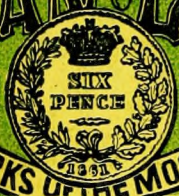




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**THE**  
**BLOCK HOUSE**



ED. ROUTLEDGE & SONS, THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.



# THE BLOCK HOUSE;

OR,

THE WRONG MAN.

*A Tale of the Early Settlements.*



LONDON :  
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS,  
THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.



# THE BLOCK HOUSE;

## OR, THE WRONG MAN:

### A TALE OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENTS

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE PEDDLER AND THE HUNTER.

“The stag, who hoped  
His foe was lost, now once more hears astunn'd  
The dreadful din. He shivers, every limb;  
He starts, he bounds, and plunges in the flood  
Precipitant. The gliding waters leave  
No trace behind.”—SOMERVILLE.

THE period at which our story opens is a few years subsequent to the great tide of emigration which had commenced pouring into the West. Numbers of enterprising and hardy adventurers had already taken up their abode among the hills and valleys of Ohio. As yet, however, this addition to the frontier population had not produced any marked change in the general appearance of the country. A clearing here and there on the banks of the river, and, at wide intervals, an embryo town springing up in the forest, were the only indications that this tide was setting toward that region. For many leagues the course of the Ohio was through an unbroken wilderness. Now and then the surface of the river was rippled by the passage of some wild beast, or the Indian canoe that skimmed like a swallow over its surface; the profound stillness of the solemn, primeval forest was only broken by the occasional howl of some of its denizens. Otherwise it seemed “silent since the birth of time.”

The sun rose bright and beautiful on the autumn morning

upon which our narrative opens. As the mist rolled away from the landscape, a scene of surpassing beauty was disclosed. Through a valley of wonderful fertility glided a broad and limpid stream, the glassy surface of which reflected surrounding objects with the distinctness of a mirror. A graceful sweep of its channel brought it in sight round a jutting point of the Ohio shore; and after flowing smoothly along for the space of two or three miles, the prospect was again closed by a picturesque island, so situated in a curve of the land, that it seemed to oppose a barrier to the further progress of the river—thus giving it the appearance of a lake. A grove of shrubbery, with here and there a papaw-tree shooting its taper stem above the rest, occupied the center of the little island, from whose grassy brink the water-willows dipped their yellow branches in the stream. The margin of the river, on one side, was a beach of pure white sand, from which rose a chain of high, romantic hills, their fringed and wavy outline boldly defined against the western sky. In the solitary ravines between them, might be heard the tiny dash and roar of some nameless tributary of the Ohio, as it tinkled over its uneven bed, or was broken into cascades by the trunks of fallen trees; and far above, a rude bridge, thrown across one of these narrow glens, added another picturesque feature to the scene. The opposite shore of the river was a level border of rich bottom-land, sweeping away to a distance from the stream, when its surface became abruptly broken by the hills which rose one behind another, until the topmost range, dim in the distance, terminated the view.

The soil on both sides was thickly covered with trees of a size which attested its luxuriance; and, towering far above the rest, the huge sycamore threw its white arms abroad, as if in conscious superiority to its brothers of the forest. Though early in the season, a slight frost had already thinned the foliage of some of the trees, and tinged the leaves of others with those gorgeous hues which render the forest-scenery of our country so glorious in decay. Among the boughs thus partly stripped of their covering, the misletoe everywhere displayed its verdant leaves and beautiful white

berries; while in the alleys and recesses beneath, enormous grape-vines twisted themselves from tree to tree, and hung their fantastic festoons through the arches of the wood.

Behind a wooded headland, near the island above mentioned, several thin columns of smoke, curling up in the still morning air, denoted the spot which had been chosen as the site of one of those villages which, few and far between, then began to dot the margin of the Ohio. At a little distance from the village, an elevated knoll, entirely denuded of trees, was crowned with a small building, the shape and construction of which showed it to have been erected as a place of defence—probably to guard against some former incursion of the Indians. At the other extremity of the view, on the side of the bluff round which the Ohio first swept into sight, a neat log-cabin might be descried through the openings in the wood; and a curious eye would not have failed to remark that it was surrounded with well-inclosed, cultivated fields, convenient outhouses, and other evidences of comfort not often met with, at the period of our narrative, in that region.

The sun had been up about an hour, and had given to the sky that serene and delicate azure which distinguishes it in the valley of the Mississippi, when the stillness of the scene was broken by the whip-like report of a rifle. The sound was yet reverberating among the hills, when a deer—its sides panting, and its eyes straining from its head—bounded down a steep bluff on the Ohio shore. It paused an instant on the margin of the flood, to cast a frightened glance around, as if doubtful which way to fly; but a crackling among the branches on the hill-side announcing its pursuer near, it sprung into the stream, and swam with all its strength toward the opposite side. In a moment after, its pursuer came rattling down the bank, catching from tree to tree as he descended. He had reached within a few rods of the botto<sup>m</sup>, and was about to make another leap, when the twigs of a dried branch snapped in his hand, and his feet slipping on the damp soil at the same moment, he fell and rolled at full length upon the beach.

This accident seemed not to have been unwitnessed. A



loud laugh, from lungs that might have rivalled Stentor's, saluted the baffled hunter, as he scrambled to his feet; and turning his head in the direction of the sound, the person whose merriment had been thus untimely awakened was seen approaching round a neighboring point. The first impulse of the sportsman seemed to be to spring among the trees, and reascend the bank, like one unwilling to be seen; but if such was his purpose, a second glance assured him it was too late; and muttering a curse, in which "d——d Yankee" were the only articulate words, he turned his back upon the intruder, began to reload his rifle.

While thus employed, his stout form relieved against the glittering sheet of water, he presented a figure of a western hunter (a race fast melting away before the advancing tide of civilization), which might have furnished a study not unworthy the chisel of Crawford. In height he was upwards of six feet, and seemed possessed of strength corresponding with his stature. His thin, skinny face was lighted by a pair of keen black eyes, which twinkled deep in their sockets with a restless motion; and the corners of his large mouth had an habitual downward curvature, that gave a disagreeable expression to his countenance. A blue linsey-woolsey hunting-shirt, trimmed with yellow fringe, was fastened at his waist by a leathern girdle, to which a bullet-pouch of otter-skin was attached in front, and a long knife, sheathed in a scabbard of skins curiously ornamented, depended from it at his side. Moccasins of buckskin protected his feet; while his legs were clad in a garment of the same material, fitted tightly to their shape, and so laced at the side that a broad edge flapped about as he moved. The collar of his hunting-shirt was thrown open, displaying a brawny neck and chest, the hue of which betokened long exposure to sun and storm. His sleeve, as it fell back from his arm, raised in the act of reloading his rifle, exposed enough of that muscular member to corroborate the idea of great strength which his general appearance created.

Having finished loading his piece, he turned toward the person whose laugh had announced his approach.

"Wal, my 'Yankee friend, what do you want?" he demanded, in a voice in which there was considerable asperity.

"What do I want, eh?" repeated the new-comer. "Waal, now, Mr. Never-miss, that is a purty question for you to ask. Haven't you ever heern tell of the *attraction of admiration*?"

"No," replied the hunter, who hardly knew how to take the meaning of the Yankee.

"Waal, now that's what has drawn me down into these parts, that same *attraction of admiration*. Hearing the report of your gun, I hurries around to get a glimpse of its effect, and *I've seen it*."

The words of the speaker were uttered with a broad provincial twang, which made it evident the epithet of Yankee had not been misapplied. He was a tall, stout young man, with a good-humoured countenance, and a shrewd, knowing look, somewhat approaching to an expression of cunning. His florid cheeks proved that he was not a permanent denizen of the western country, the inhabitants of which, at that period, were generally marked by a more sallow complexion. He held in his hand a willow staff, just taken from the tree, and as he walked slowly along the beach, seemed busily engaged in cutting a spiral strip from its bark, while a smirk on his broad face denoted that he was satisfied with his attempt at wit. A scowl was upon the hunter's brow as he replied:

"You had better mind your cart and tin pans, Mr. Peddler, and not come cavorting about me; else you'll find I'm marksman enough for you."

"Du tell," replied the Yankee, whittling as coolly as ever. "Perhaps you've never heern how we Yankees up in Connecticut shoot, did you?"

"No; but I'll swear it ain't much shooting."

"You'd swear to a lie, then, that's all. Why, you," said the peddler, looking up with a beaming countenance, "my dad was one of ~~the~~ the greatest shots that the world ever seen. He was ninety-seven years old when he died, and I remember the day before he was out huntin' till dark."

"Did he shoot any thing?"

## THE BLOCK HOUSE.

"Shoot any thing? You'd better believe he did. It took our two span of oxen a week to bring in the animiles he brought down that day. My uncle *tried* to count the bears, and deers, and turkeys that we found; but, as he never learnt to count more'n a hundred, he had to give it up before he got half through."

"Great dad he must've been; think he might have made something better than a tin peddler of his son."

Without noticing the insinuation, the personage spoken to continued:

"He was a great dad, indeed. I always felt proud of him. He used to take me out huntin' with him sometimes."

"He did, eh? Then perhaps you seed some of his great shots."

"You're right there, Mr. Never-miss; I *have* seen some of his shots."

"Let's hear some of them, then," said the hunter, sneeringly.

"The first time he ever took me out with him was when I was about six years old. I was very small of my age, handsome and delicate as I am now, and he thought a great deal of me. Waal, we hadn't been out more nor a couple of hours, when what do you suppose happened?"

"How the deuce should I know?"

"Waal, sir, a snow-storm came up, and it blew and snow awful—absolutely awful, Mr. Never-miss, so that I remember I asked dad if it didn't seem as though we were inside of a feather-bed, crawling through it. What do you suppose my dad said, when I asked him that?"

"I wan't there, and can't tell."

"Waal, sir, he didn't say any thing—not a word. But he leaned up agin an apple-tree, and laughed till he shook all the apples off—"

"Apples in snow time, eh, Mr. Peddler?" interrupted the hunter, with a curl of his lip.

"Of course, such things sometimes happen in Connecticut. Waal, he laughed till he got nearly snowed under, and then he says, 'Sonny, I thinks it's time we was going hum, doesn't

you?" and what answer, Mr. Never-miss, do you s'pose I made?"

"Can't tell, I'm sure."

"I didn't make any answer at all; not a word, except to say that I thought it pretty near time for us to think of tramping for hum; and at that we started, with the blinding snow drifting in our faces."

"I don't see as that has got any thing to do with your dad shooting so great."

"Jist hold on—hold on now, and I'll come to that bime-by. It is a bad practice to interrupt a person when he's story-telling. My teacher would never allow me to do it, when I was attending on school, and my dad wouldn't allow it when he was spinning *his* yarns."

"Go on, go on then, for heaven's sake," said the hunter, impatiently. "I see my deer has got away, and I'd as lief hear you *blow* as any man."

"As I was saying, then, Mr. Never-miss, when you interrupted me, we started for hum through the blinding snow-storm, dad walking before me to keep the snow off. He needn't have taken that trouble though, 'cause I was able to do it myself."

"How was you able?"

"You see the snow-flakes was all as large as the rim of your hat, and I bein' small, dodged them the same as I would dodge one of your bullets if you should send it after me."

"Smart boy, you; 'spect you'll soon tell me of some great shot your old man made."

"I'm coming to that; have patience. It will be interesting enough when I get to it; so please don't interrupt me agin. As I's saying, we started for hum through the blinding snow-storm, dad carrying his rifle over his shoulder. He hadn't shot any thing yet, but he did before we got hum. I s'pose we'd walked nigh onto an hour or so, when what do you suppose took place?"

"I s'pose you got *hum*," replied the hunter, accenting the last word with a sneer.

"No, sir; no such thing. We came right back to the spot

from where we started. Yes, sir, we did, and had to start over agin through the snow that came down faster than ever. And now it commenced blowing like a hurricane. I remember it blowed so, my daddy had to put some stones in his pocket to keep from being blowed away, and his coat-tails flapped in the wind like a sail that had been split by a tornado. I tell you, Mr. Never-miss, that was a regular snorter, was that blow."

"How was it that you wasn't blowed away?"

"I hung in so close under the old man's lee, that the wind didn't git a chance at me, otherways I s'pose I would have been carried out to sea, and never heard of afterward."

"An all-fired pity, then, that the wind didn't git a chance at you. I know one man in these parts that would have been glad had you been carried to the north pole by it."

"A man who makes such *wonderful* shots as I've seen just now, isn't apt to want to see others about," said the peddler, meaningly. "Though he can't help it sometimes. But, that ain't neither here nor there. We're talking about shooting, and you'll hear of a great shot pretty soon. As I observed, I was walking behind the old man, and his coat-tails were flapping in the wind like a sail, when, by Jerusalem! what do you suppose *did* happen?" demanded the peddler, now thoroughly excited at the remembrance of some occurrence.

"How many times are you going to ask me that question?" said the hunter, impatiently; "I don't know nothin' about you, nor don't want to."

"Waal, sir, what did happen was this: I was holding my head down, when something struck me on the back. I heard a mighty rushing sound, and the next minute I was sailing through the air."

"Sailing through the air!" repeated the hunter, betraying his curiosity. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Why, sir, nothing more nor less than that *an eagle* had carried me away, and was sailing afar off through the azure depths of the illimitable firmament. Yes, sir, an eagle had carried me off!"

"I s'pose he brought you back, or you wouldn't be here."

"No he didn't. He was sailing through the limbs of a big tree, when he struck his head against a limb, and knocked his brains out. Yes, sir."

"What happened then? I s'pose you fell too."

"No, my clothes caught on a limb and held me there, and I yelled like murder for dad to come and help me down. Bime-by I heard him call out, 'Sonny, are you fast?' 'Yes,' says I. 'Can't you untie yourself, and come down?' I tried hard to do it, but couldn't, and told him so. All this time it snowed so hard that I couldn't see a foot. 'Hold on, sonny,' he called out, 'and I will try and climb up and help you down.' So he tried and tried to climb, and after an hour or so got up about three feet, when he happened to think of what I had said some time before about the snow, and commenced laughing and slid back agin. So he give *that* up, and called out for me to keep up (no need of telling me to do that, 'cause I couldn't help it), and he would try to *shoot* me loose. Of course he couldn't see me, and had to guess at the aim, but he took aim and fired, and what do you s'pose he did?"

"Can't tell. Pity he didn't hit you."

"He didn't hit me, but he struck the band by which I was fast, cut it in two, and I dropped plump into his arms. *That's* what I call shooting for you. Something better than I've seen just now."

"It was an accident, my Yankee friend, that caused me to miss my deer," said the hunter, indignantly.

"A *good* marksman *never* misses his aim, nor allows his game to escape. Why, I remember the time when dad was out hunting, and he got after a deer, that run behind a big round rock, and he started after it. He run with all his might and main, but the most he could do was to get a glimpse of a stumpy tail once in a while, the cunning old buck running just fast enough to keep out of his reach."

"Why didn't the old man run the other way?"

"He did. He waited till the deer got considerably ahead of him, when he wheeled around, cocked his rifle, and started the other way, and dug as hard as he could. But I'll be

hanged if the oudacious brute didn't do the same thing. Yes, sir."

In spite of his ill-humor, the hunter laughed outright, and then instantly sobered down as if ashamed.

"Yes, sir, the derved critter turned and put the other way too. Dad turned agin, but so did the deer, and there they had it till nearly dark, chasing each other round the rock, matters sometimes looking as though the deer was chasing the old man, instead of him chasing that."

"I reckon *that* game got away from him."

"No, *sir*; dad fixed on a plan, and got him. What do you s'pose his plan was?"

"Can't tell."

"A plan that I'd advise you to foller, Mr. Never-miss, the first chance you git. He bent the barrel of his rifle so it pointed around the rock and then fired, bringing down the brute sure. He found it rather dangerous however. The bullet went through the deer, and just grazed his own face. That's the way my father managed affairs, when he was out hunting. Don't you think, my fine Mr. Never-miss," asked the peddler, with a quizzical air, "that you might learn something of him?"

"If you want to find fault with my shooting, Mr. Peddler, just take your place a hundred yards off there, or a hundred feet for that matter, and we'll soon settle who is the best shot."

The continued insinuations of the peddler had stirred up the feelings of the hunter, and he was now thoroughly indignant. While the loquacious Yankee was indulging in his characteristic story-telling, his curiosity had been sufficiently aroused to cause him to pay attention; but he now felt that he had been insulted. The peddler (unwittingly perhaps) had chosen as the subject of his taunting remark that quality on which a backwoodsman most prides himself. This was manifest by the angry glow upon his swarthy cheek.

"Brag is a good dog, but hold-fast is better," retorted the peddler, still whittling at the stick in his hand. "I wouldn't

mind accommodating you at all if I had the weapon at hand."

"Just name the time, get your gun, and I'm on hand," said the hunter, getting more and more in a passion every moment. "You'll find, as I told you awhile ago, that I'm marksman enough for *you*."

"Judging from the sample I have just seen, I wouldn't mind standing at a hundred yards, and giving you a chance, if a body might turn an honest penny by it. 'Twould be a *safe* business."

"A little more of that," said the hunter, threateningly, "and you'll rue the day you met Ned Overton."

"Pshaw, now, you don't say so," said the peddler, with a contemptuous smile, as he approached him.

"Go way, Yankee; I'm dangerous."

"As the buck, which just swum the river, can bear witness," cried the peddler, and he indulged in another hearty laugh.

"Look here, stranger," said the irritated hunter, "you're running 'ginst a snag. If you want a licking, say the word, and I'm the chap can row a whole raft of Yankees up Salt river. But if you'd rather keep whole bones in your body, jest tote yourself off, and leave me alone. It's dangerous coming fernenst the trail of a Kentuck ranger."

"Why, well done, Ned Overton," said the peddler, laughing; "you talk as if you had a strong stomach for fight this morning, and could eat a buffalo for breakfast, hide and horns into the bargain. But these heavy words don't sink my spirits. You seem to forget I was by, t'other day, when young Dudley stopped you short in the story you was telling about old Sedley's niece, and crammed the lie down your throat."

This retort alluded to a circumstance which seemed peculiarly irritating. The sunburnt face of the hunter assumed a duskier hue, and his keen black eyes glittered with passion. His fingers involuntarily tightened their grasp round the barrel of his rifle, as he gazed for a moment at the peddler, uncertain what to reply; and then, as if action were a readier



resource than speech, he flung his weapon to the ground, and springing toward him, fastened his sinewy hands firmly round his neck. The motion was not altogether unanticipated; and the peddler, by dextrously throwing his arms between those of his antagonist, and seizing his shoulder with a strong gripe, partially relieved his throat from the strangling embrace.

A struggle now ensued, which showed the combatants not unequally matched. If the hunter presented a favorable specimen of the large and vigorous frames of the frontier inhabitants, the other was no less a sturdy representative of the well-formed and muscular yeomen of New England. For some moments they strained and tugged without either gaining a decided advantage. The angry glow on the hunter's cheek deepened at each succeeding effort; while the broad face of his antagonist still retained the provoking smile it had worn from the first. The strife between them had lasted two or three minutes, and the deep footprints in the trampled sand attested the energy of their ineffectual attempts to throw each other; when at last the hunter—his lip quivering, and his eye flashing with rage—suddenly relapsed his grasp round the peddler's neck, and seizing him by the waist, drew him to his breast with desperate strength. At the same moment, bending himself stiffly back, and heaving up his chest, he succeeded in raising the stout form of his antagonist from the ground. The advantage now seemed on the side of the Kentuckian; and in an instant more he would have dashed the peddler to the earth, had not the other, who lost not his coolness for a moment, availed himself, with the quickness of thought, of his new position in a way that turned the balance in his favor. Seizing the short black locks of his adversary with one hand, while with the other he clutched his naked throat, and twining his long legs round those of the hunter, he twisted his head back with a sudden wrench, and bending his knees forward by a simultaneous and strong muscular contraction of his own nether limbs, the huge form of the Kentuckian was forced from its equilibrium, and both together came with a heavy fall to the ground. The peddler,

however, was uppermost, and springing lightly to his feet, he once more repeated the laugh which had been the first cause of offence to his antagonist.

The hunter half raised his head from the sand, and cast a covert glance slowly round, till his eye falling on his rifle, he started up, seized it by the muzzle, and swinging it through the air, was about to deal the peddler a blow which would probably have terminated the contest and his opponent's life together, when his arm was suddenly arrested by a strong grasp from behind.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TRYST IN THE WOODS.

“Cruel of heart and strong of arm,  
Loud in his sport, and keen for spoil,  
He little reck'd of good or harm,  
Fierce both in mirth and toil ;  
Yet like a dog could fawn, if need there were ;  
Speak mildly when he would, or look in fear.”—DANA.

THE hunter, on finding his arm seized, turned furiously about, as if with the purpose of transferring the attack to him who had interfered in his quarrel. He started, however, on perceiving by whose hand the blow had been prevented, and dropping his eyes in confusion, stood before the newcomer with a perplexed and crest-fallen air.

“Oh, shame, shame !” said the young man who had arrived at a moment so opportune for the itinerant vender of small wares—“shame !” said he, stepping between the combatants as he spoke, “thus to mar the quiet of this lovely morning with your untimely brawls. I fear, Dodge, this quarrel comes of some unseasonable jest of yours. And you, Mr. Overton—one would think you might find in these broad forests better employment for your rifle than thus to use it as a club against your companion.”

"Do the man justice, squire Dudley," cried the loquacious peddler; "he begun at the right end—he tried the muzzle first. But as I happened to witness that the deer stood in little danger from his clumsy rifle used in that way, he thought he'd show me that he could take better aim with the butt. I vow to gracious it was like to prove a knock-down argument if it hadn't been for you."

"I hope, Mr. Overton, you have too much sense to mind the rude mirth of such an inveterate jester as Nathan Dodge," said the young man, interpreting aright the belligerent look which the hunter turned toward the peddler. "It is part of his trade, you know, to be facetious, and helps him to drive his bargains."

"Let him keep his rigs for the women, then, when he sells them pit-coal for indigo, and pewter spoons for silver," said the surly hunter. "But if he reckons to crack his jokes upon me—"

"You'll crack your rifle upon my head," interrupted the ready peddler. "You see, squire Dudley, what's bred in the bone it's hard beating out of the flesh, as they say. Surly Ned will never learn to be civil, till some of the 'd—d Yankees,' as he calls them, pound good manners into him."

"You are ever too quick of speech, Dodge," replied Dudley; "and I question much if the remedy you are so forward to prescribe might not be of service to yourself."

"What, strap-oil, hey?—ha! ha! I should like to see the doctor who would undertake to administer it," retorted Dodge, drawing himself up with an air that showed he felt full confidence in his great size and strength.

"But, Mr. Overton," resumed Dudley, "I am surprised to see you here. I thought by this time you were a day's journey on your way to Canada. I surely heard that you had set out yesterday, and little expected to meet you in this neighborhood." The last words were distinguished by a slight emphasis.

"Hah, that's true," added the peddler; "I wonder I didn't think on it. But now you mention it, I do remember hearing in the village last evening that Overton had started;

and let me see—why, yes, so it was—it was his own brother, Hugh Overton, that said so.”

The hunter muttered something in reply which was not remarkably intelligible, but the purport of which seemed to be that he had designed commencing his journey on the previous morning, and had actually set out, when he recollected certain matters which made it necessary for him to return. He concluded by saying that, having completed the business which recalled him, he was now ready to recommence his journey; “And, indeed,” added he, casting his eyes toward the sun, “I ought to have been upon the road an hour ago.”

As he finished speaking, he nodded a clumsy adieu to Dudley, and picking up the otter-skin cap which had fallen from his head during the scuffle, he turned, and began to ascend the bluff.

“There goes a genuine sulky scamp of a hunter,” said the peddler, as the object of his remark disappeared among the trees. “He sets more by his rifle than his own mother, and hates a Yankee worse than a rattlesnake.”

“We should seek to remove his prejudices, and conciliate good-will by kindness, Dodge; not increase dislike by needless opposition.”

“That for his good-will!” replied the peddler, snapping his fingers contemptuously. “He has done all he can to spoil my trade; he calls me cheat, interferes in my bargains, and runs down my wares: and it’s a hard case if I can’t crack a harmless joke upon him now and then when we meet. As for you, squire Dudley, your kindness is wasted upon him, and I advise you to be upon your guard. He owes you a grudge; and I have heard him swear he would be revenged for some injury or other he supposes you have done him.”

“He is in truth a surly dog, Dodge; but one that barks so much seldom bites. At all events, he is now leaving the country, probably for a long time; and so, for a while at least, we shall have nothing to apprehend from either the one or the other.”

So saying, the young man turned to pursue his way; and

the peddler, opening his knife, resumed his occupation of ornamenting his staff, as he trudged whistling along toward the distant village, which lay in the opposite direction.

The hunter, in the mean while, had reached the summit of the bluff, when, crossing a road that wound along its brow, he plunged into the wood on the opposite side, and strode forward at a rapid pace. The mellow notes of the brilliant red-bird were heard in the top branches of the forest, and flocks of mocking-birds, disturbed by the rustling of the leaves beneath his feet, displayed their blue plumage in the sunbeams as they flitted screaming from tree to tree. These sights and sounds, however, were not heeded by the irritated hunter. Low mutterings partly betrayed the workings of his mind, as he hurried along with that peculiar trotting gait which marks as well the white inhabitant as the native Indian of our forests. His countenance wore a mixed expression of anger and dissatisfaction, as if he blamed himself for the course he had pursued.

"Curses on that Yankee," he muttered, clinching his fists and gnashing his teeth as he spoke. "That isn't the first time he has crossed my path, but it's the last time."

He walked rapidly some distance in silence, but soon broke out again :

"I was an outrageous fool to show my madness afore that Dudley. I'm afraid it will look bad for me and Hugh, when we come to settle up that little business we have on hand. Let me think a minute."

He leaned up against a tree as he spoke, and for some time seemed occupied in deep thought. That his meditation was not pleasant, was manifest from the deep scowl that remained upon his countenance. However, after he had stood thus many minutes, a different expression lit up his face—an expression of exulting triumph, as though he had decided upon some scheme that should insure a balm for his wounded feelings.

"I can let that peddler pass for the present," said he, speaking more coolly now that the heat of his passion had passed. "I have more important matters on hand, and can't afford to

stop for trifles. What the mischief is that?" asked the hunter, with an expression of curiosity, stretching his neck, and peering at some object a short distance away. The more he looked the more he seemed puzzled.

"Hang me for a cheating Yankee if I have ever seen any thing like that," he muttered, walking slowly toward it.

The object, viewed from his stand-point, seemed like a pair of human feet and legs sticking straight up in the air. They remained perfectly stationary, as though they were held there by some supernatural power. As Overton approached, he observed that the feet were bare and were of a black color.

"By the powers! but that beats every thing I ever *did* see. If them ain't a pair of darkey's feet, then my eyes ain't worth a copper. Just hold on a minute till I see."

Picking up a stone, he hurled it at the objects mentioned, striking one with considerable force. It was seen to twinkle a moment, and then both feet instantly disappeared, and in their place appeared the black, shining, grinning face of Cato, a darkey belonging to the family of Mr. Sedley, a personage who is to play an important part in our story.

"Yah! yah! yah!" he laughed, showing a magnificent set of teeth; "yah! yah! yah! dat you, massa Overton?"

"Have you got a new way of walking, you black dog?"

"Yah, yah! taking a nap, dat what dis child a doin'?"

"Have you heard any thing I've been sayin'?"

"Hain't heard nuffin'. Felt somefin' on my toe-nail though; yah! yah!"

"If you've heard any thing I've said, and go to blabbin', I'll break every bone in your black body."

"Hain't heard nuffin'," repeated the negro, kicking up his heels in greater merriment than ever.

"Say, Cato, come here," said the hunter, in a more pleasant voice.

"Don't catch dis child dat way," said the negro, edging off from the hunter as though he feared him.

"I don't want to hurt you. Come closer, I've got something to say to you."

"Say it out den."

"I'm afraid some one might hear it if I should speak it out here. Come closer."

"Nobody but dis child in dese parts. Dis am his estates, and he doesn't 'low intruders to come around."

"What do you do when they chance to come?" asked the hunter, who seemed to have a singular desire to ingratiate himself into the good graces of this negro, whom, at any other time, he would have spurned with his foot. It was very evident this was the prelude to some plot that he had decided upon.

"What do you do, Cato, when they happen to come upon your estates?"

"Orders dem off, under extreme penalty ob de rigger ob de law."

"Suppose they refuse."

"I swells up wid righteous indignation and makes a speech."

"Make a speech! What can you make a speech about?"

"Tells 'em 'bout de glorious country dat dey am disgracin' by dere opprobrious course of conduct in de face ob de opposition, and de worldly endearment dat am from time inculcated in all de animadversions, moreover, also, and so forfe. Yah! yah! What t'ink ob dat speech?"

Whether Overton thought it humorous or not, he laughed very heartily, and seemed mightily pleased.

"I call it decidedly rich, Cato, decidedly rich, I say. I s'pose such a speech is pretty sure to convince them."

"Not exactly. Doesn't always care for Cato's eloquence."

"What do you do then?"

"Tells 'em I'll be under de painful necessity of inflictin' summary corporal chastisement upon dere personal selfs."

"And suppose they still refuse?"

"Den I tells 'em dat either dey or myself must lebe de premises."

"And if they remain?"

"Den I lebes, ob course. Yah! yah!"

Overton seated himself upon the ground, threw back his

head and laughed most heartily, as though he never before had heard of such strategy.

"You appear very funny, Cato, this morning. Something must have happened to put you in good-nature."

"Cato is allus good-natured. Massa Overton seem mighty pleased about somefin' too."

"Yes, pleased most d——," muttered the hunter, who seemed to despise himself for the mirth he had counterfeited.

"Nebber notice Cato oder times," continued the negro, who was cute enough to see that there was something behind these actions of the hunter. "Mighty good-natured, dis morning, massa Overton."

"Not so very good-natured. How long since you left home, Cato?"

"'Bout an hour, more or less."

"Folks all well?"

"Dey was kickin' 'round purty spry when I left, 'specially Massa Sedley."

"And why especially him?"

"He gib Cato a big kick, to show dat his strength hadn't left him yet. Doesn't think it has. Yah! yah!"

"What did he kick you for?"

"For exercise, s'pose."

"It couldn't have been that. I know Sedley is very kind. What was it now? You might as well tell your old friend."

"Tell ole friend?" repeated the negro, rolling up his big, bright eyes with a most comical expression.

"Yes, of course," replied the hunter, blushing. "I'm your friend, and always have been."

"Didn't lick me for nuffin' much. I wanted to shoot a little, and put de mark up on de brindle cow, and missed de mark."

"Did you miss the cow?"

"No, dat's where de trouble was. I hit de cow in de eye and killed her. Dat's what massa kicked me fur."

"He ought to have been ashamed of himself. How is Miss Lucy?"



"She well, 'cordin' to last accounts. 'Pears to 'prove, under de fosterin' care ob Mr. Dudley."

The hunter's eyes sparkled. The negro had chanced upon the very theme toward which he himself had attempted so awkwardly to lead him.

"So squire Dudley calls occasionally, does he?"

"What mean by occasionally, eh?" asked Cato, with a curious expression.

"Well, say once every day or two."

"Mr. Dudley doesn't call occasionally, den."

"Not so often then?"

"Yah! yah! he call *double* occasionally."

The old scowl flitted over the hunter's face as he asked:

"And how does Miss Lucy take it?"

"Oh de Lord golly hebbins! Git out now! She lubs him to def. Dream 'bout him all night, talk 'bout him all day."

"She thinks a great deal of him then, I suppose? Of course she does if she dreams and talks about him constantly. Any prospect of their getting married very soon?"

"Cato doesn't know. He tried hard to make Miss Lucy tell him all her secrets and ax advice ob him, but she 'pears coy, modest-like, as dough she has compunkens ob conscience about it."

"What do you think about it? You certainly have some chance to know."

"I t'inks den dey be married mighty soon. 'Cause why: Miss Lucy is sewin' up good many *white clothes*, and when she sees a little baby, she 'pears to take a mighty sight ob interest in it. Dat what *I* calls circumstantial evidence dat am conclusive. I allus noticed dat when folks are gittin' ready to git ined in mattermony, each one takes a great interest in all de babies dat comes around."

"When do you imagine they intend getting married?"

"T'inks berry soon—yas, sir, berry soon."

"In a week?"

"In a week? yah! yah! In two days—maybe to-morrer; most likely to-morrer—purty sure dey will."

"The devil!" exclaimed the hunter, forgetting himself in

his fury, and starting up as if he had been stung by a snake. "You're a lying, Cato."

"Dat what I *t'inks*," replied the negro, tipping over on his head and kicking up his heels in the air. "Isn't sure; you ax Cato what he *t'inks*, and *dat's* what it is."

Overton paced backward and forward, greatly excited over what he had heard. Calming himself as well as he could in a few moments, he turned to the negro and said :

"You're purty sure they intend getting married to-morrow, Cato?"

"*T'inks* so, dat's all."

"Well, sir, I want you to remember one thing. Do you understand?"

"S'pose I will when I hears it."

"Don't you breathe a word of what I've said or asked yo to any living mortal, and especially to those in Sedley's house. Don't ever let them know you have seen me. Do you promise?"

"I promise, if you promise me nebber to tell any one dat I's been in conversation wid you."

"Of course. Why don't you wish me to tell any one?"

"Might injure my reputation 'mong de 'spectable portion ob de population."

The hunter was strongly tempted to show the negro that he was also "well and kicking," at this impudence; but, remembering that it was best to keep his good-will, he merely laughed, and added that he should be careful to keep it a secret from all. Then leaving the darkey, he turned and walked rapidly away.

Pressing briskly forward for the space of a quarter of an hour, he reached a place where the soil descended by a steep declivity into a deep valley, in which the trees grew at wider intervals, and the ground between was free from bushes and underwood. A rapid stream whirled and gurgled through the midst, the long green herbage of its banks bending over to kiss the braided current as it glanced away. The air of the valley was damp, as was shown in the rankness of the tall grass, and in the soft, verdant moss that tufted the bark of

the tress, and covered with a coating of velvet the old trunks that for ages had "cumbered the forest-floor." Here the hunter paused, and, after casting his eye slowly round, as if he had expected to meet some one in that secluded spot, placed his hand to his mouth, and uttered a shrill, low cry. The sound startled a flock of wild fowl from a neighbouring swamp, and they rose screaming into the air, directing their flight to a more southern region. As the flapping noise of their wings died away, silence again settled on the scene. The hunter paused a moment to listen, then repeated the cry, shriller and louder than before. An answering cry was now heard at a distance, and in a few minutes a second person approached the spot. His general appearance was not unlike that of the hunter, save that he was considerably shorter, and his seamed face and grizzled locks showed that he was further advanced in years.

The two, on meeting, entered into low and earnest conversation, in the course of which the hunter related the adventures of the morning, suppressing only that part which the peddler would probably have most gloried in telling. His companion listened to the story with a contracted brow, as if not pleased with its purport; and at its conclusion he expressed a fear that the hunter's being thus seen lurking in the neighbourhood, when it was supposed he had set off for Canada, might have a tendency to excite suspicions that would defeat his plans.

"Never fear, Hugh," replied Overton; "faint heart never won fair lady. Leave all to me, and I'll steer through these rifles yet."

"The men grumble for being kept so long after the boat is loaded," said the other.

"They shan't need to wait much longer, anyhow," answered the hunter.

"The river is falling every minute. There is hardly water now to carry us over the Falls."

"Well, well, Hugh," replied the hunter, impatiently, "I'll finish the job this night, come what will of it. Do you get the hands together, and start down by sunset. I'll meet you

at the big rock in the Round Bend; and if I ain't there by the time the moon goes down, why then start on to Orleans without me."

"I'm dubious about this business," said Hugh, hesitatingly. "The old man has eyes like a hawk."

"And why can't you contrive to draw the hawk from its nest? There's that old clearing you've been bantering about—set the trap with that bait, and you'll catch the old fox, cunning as he is."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE VILLAGERS.

"*Celia.* Bonjour, Monsieur Le Beau, what's the news?  
*Le Beau.* Why, this that I speak of."—AS YOU LIKE IT.

"And though the wintry tempests rage the while,  
 Domestic legends shall the night beguile;  
 Or literary taste its charms impart,  
 To please the fancy and improve the heart."

PARTING from the peddler, Dudley pursued his way toward the log-cabin, mentioned as occupying a green bluff, round whose base the Ohio swept in one of those graceful curves which diversify the course of that magnificent stream. He was a tall, well-shaped young man, of some six or seven and twenty; his manly countenance lighted by bright, blue eyes; his lips wearing a quiet, habitual smile, denoting amenity of disposition. He had arrived, some four or five months prior to the date of our story, at the little village which we shall name Adrianopolis. He stated, on landing, that he was on his way to New Orleans, and expressed an intention of soon resuming his journey. But day after day, and week after week passed, and still he lingered in the neighborhood, until, finally, he seemed to have forgotten or wholly abandoned his original intention.

There was in Adrianopolis the new, as doubtless there was in Adrianopolis of old, a class of industrious people, whose philanthropy led them to study the affairs of strangers, even to the neglect of their own. By these, various causes were assigned for the delay of Charles Dudley—some of them of a description not exceedingly flattering to his character.

The information on which most of the current rumours were founded, if traced to its source, rested with the postmaster of the village—a busy, loquacious little gentleman, with a humpback, who officiated in the double capacity of tavern-keeper and postmaster; and who, from the laudable motive of furnishing entertainment for his customers in one department of his vocation, was suspected of looking rather more closely into the contents of the small weekly budget of the post-boy, than was required by his oath of office in the other.

On a rainy, drizzly afternoon, shortly after the incidents narrated in the preceding chapter, the usual number of loafers at the tavern was increased by several, whose frugal wives gave them this privilege only upon such rainy days as the present. First of all was the postmaster himself, who, seated on a high stool, behind the end of the counter apportioned to the use of Government, exchanged greetings with every one who opened the door. When asked for a letter, the postmaster never looked nor guessed amiss, for he knew the address of the twenty epistles, as if he had had them in his possession for so many years. The top of his head was bald, and his grizzly hair brushed up toward it; and a large quillpen being usually placed over his ear, he wore the appearance of a man of business. Now and then he slid off his stool to mix the drinks of his customers, and occasionally to moisten his own throat, when his exceeding volubility made it necessary.

Seated by the huge fireplace was the village schoolmaster, who wore prodigious shirt-collars, used exceedingly long, and, sometimes, misplaced words, and was the *dernier resort* in all arguments and disputes, his head being supposed to contain all the knowledge that a human skull is ever allowed to hold.

He rejoiced in the name of Perkins, and, of course, was from Connecticut. He was nursing a blue umbrella between his knees, just at present, and drying his enormous boots—looking, at the same time, very dignified, and profoundly learned. Then there was a lazy, tipsy, overgrown, sleepy-headed fellow, who was always in the bar-room, with his chair tipped against the wall, and his legs crossed at an elevation above his head, his eyes blinking continually, like an owl at noon-day. Then there were the shoemaker, tailor, and others hardly deserving of an individual introduction. Nathan Dodge, the tin peddler, who, in appearance, resembled Mr. Perkins, the schoolmaster, was one of the assembled worthies.

“Mr. Hunt,” said the schoolmaster, turning his head around and addressing the postmaster, “hasn’t a letter addressed personally to me arrove yet?”

“I’ll see, Mr. Perkins,” returned the postmaster, fumbling over the pile in the corner of his drawer, knowing well enough that there was none for him. “No, sir,” he replied, looking up, “there hasn’t any arroved yet.”

“It’s remarkably singular, remarkably singular,” said Mr. Perkins, heaving one boot over his knee again. “I have anticipatigly expected that letter for two months, and it is still *volens volens*.”

“Very true; disapp’intments awaits us in all vocations of life. I am very sorry—indeed I am, Mr. Perkins; but I do not see how it can be helped—not at all.”

“Who might it be, now, you expect a letter from?” asked Dodge, the peddler, in his most insinuating tones. “Some girl, eh?” in a sepulchral voice.

The teacher looked straight at the fire for a few minutes, and then said, as if speaking to it:

“My mother.”

“Oh! ah! didn’t think—sorry,” said Dodge. “Not alarmed, I hope?”

Mr. Perkins drew out of his side-pocket about two yards of homespun linen, blew his nose vigorously upon it, wiped the corners of his eyes, then dropping it in his lap, looked straight into the fire, and still talking to it, said:

"It's remarkably singular. I *am* troubled about it."

"Sorry, now, to hear it; don't feel worried about *my* mother, and know she doesn't feel worried about me; 'cause why—we're both able to take care of ourselves," said the peddler.

"That's more than *some* people can do, I fear," said the shoemaker, speaking as if he held a most profound mystery locked up in his breast. All, including the schoolmaster, looked toward him, while he looked more dreadfully mysterious than ever.

"Eh! what's up, now—something new?" queried the peddler.

"What's happened—any thing ser'ous?" asked the postmaster.

"Remember, I hain't said nothing," said the shoemaker, gesticulating very earnestly, apparently as excited as if accused of some capital misdemeanour. "I hain't said nothing—nothing at all."

"I am morally certain no one has accused you of it," said Mr. Perkins with a bland smile.

"Remember, I hain't said nothing," he burst out again, as though the last remark had been a direct accusation.

"By thunder! I sh'd think you'd said enough," growled the toper with his chair tipped against the wall, blinking harder than ever at the listener.

"Come, now, Jaky," said the postmaster, "you might as well tell us what you mean. It'll never go no further, I'm sure."

"I hain't said—" here the shoemaker suddenly relapsed into a sullen silence, which required the united efforts of all to break.

"I don't see no use in bein' so mighty clus about it," said the tailor, who immediately got up and sat down again, to relieve himself of the embarrassment of being gazed at by the others.

"Come, now, what is it?" persisted Dodge, growing impatient.

"I see no cause to the adequate effect of your persevering in your silence," solemnly added the schoolmaster.

Thus urged, the shoemaker said, in a half-whisper, glancing furtively about him :

“ You’ve got a boarder at your house, haven’t you ? ”

This question was addressed to the postmaster, who promptly replied :

“ I’ve had several, sir.”

“ But, you know, you’ve got one now.”

“ Mr. Perkins, as he ‘ boards around,’ is counted as one of mine, and I sometimes has others.”

“ I mean, I mean [glancing at the door] Charles Dudley,” said the shoemaker, heaving a deep sigh.

The expression that lit up the other faces showed that every one, with, perhaps, the exception of the tipsy man with his chair against the wall, had been thinking of the same individual. Nathan Dodge, perhaps, was the only one who was favorably impressed toward the person so mysteriously alluded to. The way now being opened, the exchange of views commenced at once.

“ I makes it a p’int never to meddle with what ain’t none of my business,” said the postmaster. “ Charles Dudley pays me every Saturday night in good solid gold, and I axes no questions. He gets letters, too, as reg’lar as the mail comes, which, most of them, has ‘ New Orleans ’ stamped onto the outside. He told me when he fust come here that he didn’t expect to stay no longer than two or three weeks ; and it’s now more than two months. I doesn’t wish to meddle with other folks’ business, but it does strike me queer that he should stay around here so long.”

“ Exceedingly natural, beyond all peradventure, that it should strike you thus,” said Mr. Perkins.

“ What was that you observed, Mr. Perkins ? ” asked the postmaster, who had heard every word, but was afraid the others had not. The teacher repeated his remark.

“ You have saw the gentleman, then, Mr. Perkins ? ” resumed the postmaster.

“ I have observed him several times.”

“ I’ve hearn tell,” commenced the shoemaker, who, it was



noticeable, had "hearn tell" of many nameless things, "that Mr. Dudley stays here for his own good."

Several drew great sighs at this astounding intelligence.

"I have s'picioned that too," added the tailor, who again got up and sat down to throw off his embarrassment. "What is your opinion, Mr. Perkins?"

"My opinion of what?"

The tailor was thrown into such consternation by this pointed question—the teacher looking directly in his face at the same time—that he blew his nose several times, coughed, and finally stammered out that he thought it was bad weather out of doors.

"What name does he go by?" asked the shoemaker, with a very innocent look.

"Mr. Charles Dudley."

"Wonder if that's his name. I've hearn tell that it wasn't."

"Who told you so?" demanded Dodge, with considerable asperity.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be best to tell. Folks don't like to have their names in everybody's mouth."

"I guess, if Nathan Dodge may be allowed to express his opinion, Charles Dudley would think he was getting his in a good many mouths, and none of them over-clean at that."

"Folks that does as *he* does must expect to be talked about," said the postmaster, with great severity.

"Most certainly; it is an immutable law in human science, most remarkably exemplified in numerous instances which have come under my cognizance during the past few years," added Mr. Perkins, philosophically.

Upon hearing this last remark, all, with the exception of the man with his chair tipped against the wall, looked at the peddler, as if they expected him to sink out of sight before the ponderous learning of the schoolmaster. But the peddler bore it unflinchingly, and reddened slightly as he added:

"The best of men are talked about, and them as talk about them are generlly not the best!"

"You seem to have took a wonderful liking to this Charles Dudley?" said the shoemaker.

"Dunno as I have; but I hain't took a dislike to him, as all of you have, just 'cause he minds his own business."

"I'd like to know what business he's got to be poking round this village all this time. As for me, I think it's for no good;" whereupon the shoemaker compressed his lips, nodded his head, buttoned up his coat, and looked as though he had pronounced the death-sentence of the person in question.

"What I've been s'picioning all along," added the tailor, who, this time, resolutely faced the eyes that bore upon him, although he grew very red in the face under the ordeal.

"When chaps come from the other side of the mountains, without no one expecting them, it won't do no hurt to watch 'em," added the shoemaker.

"Then, I vow, Mr. Shoe-pegs, you need watching," said the peddler; "for that's just the way you came."

"Well, it's none of your business if I did."

"And it's none of your business if Charles Dudley did," promptly answered Dodge, leaning forward, and nodding his head very slightly at his opponent.

At this point in the debate, the red-faced man with his chair tipped against the wall, commenced snoring so loudly that the schoolmaster, fearing that he was choking, motioned to the tailor to awaken him. The latter, with the intention of rousing him, placed his hand on one of the sleeper's shoes, and shook it so awkwardly that the rear legs of the chair slid forward on the floor, the man's heels went up, his head down, jamming his hat over his eyes, and waking him most thoroughly. Frightened at the crash, the tailor caught hold of the man's pantaloons to lift him to his feet, but only succeeded in tearing a hole in the not over-strong garment.

"There! you've got to mend *that* hole," said the red-faced man, wrathfully. "If you don't, I'll lam you."

"I'll do it; I'll do it. Ain't you hurt?"

"Yes, nearly killed. What'd you shove me over fer?"

"I didn't mean to do it. I meant to wake you, is all. Can't I do something for your hurt?"

"A little Monongehaly will help 'em amazin'."

The tailor saw at once the *ruse* that had been played upon him, but had sense enough not to manifest any ill-pleasure; he, therefore, "stood treat," after which the sleepy fellow sat down in his chair, tipped it back against the wall, threw one leg over the other, and shut his eyes as before.

At this juncture, and before the conversation was renewed, some one was heard fumbling at the door outside. The tailor, after looking impatiently toward it for a few moments, suddenly sprung up to assist whoever might be there, when it slowly opened, and a regular country bumpkin made his appearance. He was about a dozen years old, with a flaxen head, great staring eyes, as round and clear as globes of glass, and enormous mouth, constantly open, disclosing a fine set of even teeth. His coat was evidently his father's, for the skirt hung nearly to his feet, and was of a deep dusky-brown color. Every now and then he drew the sleeve of this across a fat pug-nose, accompanying the motion by a shutting of his eyes, and a snuff, as though the sleeve were filled with a sweet perfume. His hands were encased in prodigious mittens, while the boots he wore, if made for him, were designed, apparently, to fit him when he came to man's estate.

He shut the door by backing against it, and then stared a minute around the room, with that wandering, aimless look so peculiar to children. As his eye rested upon Mr. Perkins, who did not notice him, he started bolt upright, and moved up to the bar. It was plain he was one of the schoolmaster's pupils.

"Well, sir, what do you want? Some toddy?" asked the postmaster, with a smirk and a desperate attempt to be witty.

"No," replied the boy, giving that heavy, aspirating sound, and meaningless grin, which are so natural to boyhood when placed in similar circumstances.

"What is it then?"

"Is there a letter for George Washington Jefferson Franklin Madison Smith?"

"No, sir—none for him."

"Ain't thar none there for Melinda Isabella Almina Smith?"

"Here's one for her—Miss Malinda I. A. Smith. I s'pose that's her, ain't it?"

Instead of speaking, the boy rapidly nodded his head up and down about a dozen times, then snuffed and drew his sleeve across his nose. He took the letter in both hands, but, instead of departing, stood looking at the postmaster, as if his errand was still unfinished.

"Well, sir, is there any thing more?"

"Sue said if thar's a letter o' hern here, I musn't tell any one it's from that ar' raftsmen what staid a few days at our house this spring, and I hain't told you, have I?"

"Oh, no—not at all."

The boy seemed highly pleased, and was about to depart, when Mr. Perkins, looking straight into the fire before him, called out:

"Hezekiah!"

"What—eh—sir, sir?" answered the urchin, looking toward him, as if he expected to be whipped for some offence.

"Why wasn't you at school yesterday? I'm afraid you played *hooky*."

"No, sir, I didn't. I don't play hooky no more since you and dad licked me so."

"I'm glad to hear it. What, then, was the immediate and due cause of your absenting yourself from instruction yesterday?"

"Eh—what—sir?"

"Why didn't you come to school yesterday?"

"Me and Bill—"

"William, you mean."

"Me and William was huntin' hen's nestes, and Bill—"

"William, remember."

"And William pushed me off the hay-mow, and I broke my neck!"

"Broke your neck!" exclaimed Nathan Dodge. "Who mended it for you?"

"Dad put some salve on it, and it got well."

"Very well, sir; be more careful after this, Hezekiah."

"Sir—eh—what—sir?"

"How much is twice eight?"

"Sixteen," answered Hezekiah, after a moment's hesitation.

"What's the capital of the United States?"

"Jefferson."

"Wrong—think now, before you answer *again*."

"Madison."

"No, sir; your memory needs jogging, I apprehend. Once more."

"Then it must be Franklin."

"No, *sir*."

"Then I'll be darned if it ain't Washington. I knowed it was one of George's names."

"That'll do; you can go now."

The boy instantly shot out the door and disappeared.

"It's amazing how them boys of yourn improve, Mr. Perkins," said the postmaster, who had not forgotten the encouraging remark the teacher had made in his favor.

Mr. Perkins, looking very dignified, took the compliment as a matter of course.

"But you know we was talkin' about this man—Mr. Charles Dudley, I believe," added the postmaster, who was anxious to keep up the discussion.

"I think you've said about enough about your superiors," said Nathan Dodge, rather decidedly.

"Who calls him a s'perior?" demanded the shoemaker, sitting bolt upright, and firing up at these continued insinuations.

"Why, I do—superior to you, any day!"

The shoemaker sprung from his seat, and turning his back to the door, commenced gesticulating wildly and talking excitedly:

"I say that that 'ere Charles Dudley, as is staying round here, ain't no better than he orter be—he ain't staying for no good—who knows where he come from?—what did he leave home for?—eh?—I sh'd like to know that—I say, I s'picion that Dudley—"

At this point the door again opened, and Charles Dudley himself entered. The tailor at once commenced making signs to the speaker ; but he was too excited to notice him, or hear the door close. Dudley, hearing his name called, stood smilingly by the door, and listened.

“ Yes, sir, I s’picion that Dudley, and reaffirm, and repeat that he ain’t no better than he order be—no, not a bit ; and if I had the laws in my hands—”

Happening to turn so as to get a glimpse of the person he was defaming, the excited shoemaker stopped instantly, turned pale, coughed, and said : “ I guess it’s gettin’ nigh on to supper time,” and, unheedful of the laughter of the listeners, in which none joined more heartily than Dudley himself, he bolted out of the door and disappeared.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LUCY DAYTON.

- “ *Polizines.* This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
Ran on the green sward. Nothing she does or seems,  
But smacks of something greater than herself,  
Too noble for this place.
- “ *Cumillo.* He tells her something  
That makes her blood look out. Good sooth, she is  
The queen of curds and creams.”—WINTER’S TALE.

AFTER separating and reconciling the combating hunter and peddler, young Dudley ascended the acclivity of the bluff by a steep footpath, up which he strode with the active step of one whose spirits are animated and his limbs hardy from health and exercise. The center of a natural lawn upon its summit was occupied by a log-cabin, which, though rude and humble, had been constructed with more attention to symmetry and neatness than was often displayed in the simple dwellings of the frontier inhabitants. Around it, at convenient intervals, were several little appliances for comfort, which, if clumsy substitutes for the appendages of a well-

ordered farm-house in the more populous States, yet evinced a degree of industry and refinement by no means common in Ohio at that early period. The fields surrounding the house had been almost wholly cleared of the forest, presenting in that respect a marked contrast with the "clearings" of other settlers, where scanty patches of corn showed their yellow leaves between girdled and blackened trees, which still spread their naked arms over the soil their foliage had long ceased to shade. The pillars of a rude portico in front of the cabin were wreathed, and its roof almost covered, by a trumpet honey-suckle vine, whose delicious fragrance perfumed all the surrounding air. A small, neatly-inclosed garden extended a short way down the southern declivity of the bluff, and exhibited in its clean, graveled walks, in the order and arrangement of its plants, and in the tasteful disposition of its beds, gay with a thousand hues, the attention of woman's delicate hand.

The features of this scene seemed too familiar to Charles Dudley to elicit more than a passing glance. Stepping quickly to the cabin, he tapped lightly on the door, and, without waiting to be invited, raised the latch, and entered the rustic abode.

The principal apartment bore traces of refinement calculated to confirm the favorable impressions created by the exterior. On one side, a case of hanging shelves supported a small collection of well-chosen volumes; on the other, two portraits, evidently from the pencil of no inferior artist, were suspended from the rough-hewn wall, which had been white-washed till its hue rivalled that of new-fallen snow. Bouquets of flowers, tastefully arranged in earthen jars upon the chimney-shelf, diffused their odors throughout the room; and a few exotics, too delicate to bear the autumnal temperature of the atmosphere, occupied a bench near a half-raised window, through which the morning sun shone pleasantly. An air of the most perfect taste pervaded the apartment, giving to it an appearance of comfort which more stately and sumptuously furnished dwellings might envy. Even the ordinary household utensils, arranged on the shelves of a

triangular closet in one corner, were polished till they shone like silver.

The occupants of the room were a male and a female. The former was a tall, spare man, slightly bowed by age, which had also thinned his gray locks, and planted deep wrinkles on his brow. A glance from his face to that of the male portrait could not have failed to detect a resemblance between them; though one could hardly have turned from contemplating the flushed cheek and bright eye of five-and-twenty, as imaged on the canvas, to the faded features of the original, without a sigh for the havoc which the intervening years had made.

His companion was a female, whose slender form was just rounding into womanhood, and whose sweet countenance exhibited a happy expression of blended innocence and intelligence, such as Correggio loved to study and portray. The peach-like bloom upon her face was heightened to crimson at the entrance of Charles Dudley; while the deepening dimple of her cheek, and the added brightness of her eyes, showed that the emotion caused by his visit was of the soul.

“Good morning to you,” said Dudley, in a pleasant voice; “or I suppose it would be more proper for me to say ‘good day,’ as the hours have progressed so far.”

“Good-day, I’m glad to see you,” said the old man, rising and cordially shaking his hand.

“And how do *you* do, Lucy?” asked Dudley, imprinting a warm kiss upon the glowing cheek of the young maiden, whose half-averted countenance was ruffled by no prudish frown at this free salutation.

“I was later than I intended to be,” said Dudley, taking the proffered chair. “There was a little matter out in the wood in which I had to bear a slight part.”

The old man looked at him with such an inquiring expression, that Dudley had no alternative but to explain:

“Hearing high words, I made my way through the undergrowth, to find Ned Overton the hunter, and that peddler they call Dodge, engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. I stepped between them just in time to save the peddler



from getting his head broken, although, in a fair fight, he is a match for the burly hunter."

"Ned Overton, did you say?" asked the old man, in displeased surprise. "Why, I supposed he was on his way to Canada."

"That appears to be the general impression, but from some cause or other, he still remains in the vicinity."

"Ah's me! I never liked that man, and it looks bad to see him still in this neighborhood. I would much rather he were away."

"So would I, although I do not feel the apprehension that perhaps you do."

Now, to tell the truth, Dudley desired the absence of the individual referred to, just as much as did his elderly friend; for he had known, for a considerable time, that the fellow was a would-be lover of his betrothed; and although he knew that she looked upon him only with aversion, yet being a lover himself, he could not but experience a natural jealousy. He knew Ned Overton to be sullen, vindictive, and ugly-tempered enough to spare no means to accomplish his ends; and this unexpected discovery of his presence at that particular moment, indicated no good. Dudley had no fears for his personal safety; but, as his appointed wedding-day drew near, he began to entertain the most lively apprehension in regard to the maiden of his choice. The last remark or two which the old man had made had the effect of strengthening these apprehensions.

"I understand," said Dudley, with a faint smile, "he is a great admirer of Lucy."

"Yes," replied the father, "he has troubled her considerably. She has taken every means to get rid of him, but he persists in tormenting her until it has really alarmed her."

"His attentions must cease very shortly. I have no power to prevent them now, but after she is my wife, let him but show his face, and I would shoot him as I would a dog."

"Ay, and so would I," said the elder personage somewhat in heat; "such a vulgar, ill-bred, malignant man as he is fit only to mate with an Indian squaw."

"He can not trouble us long, at any rate in a village like this, where he is so widely known, he would dare to attempt any violence."

"Ah, my young friend, I knew Ned Overton a dozen years ago, and blood was on his hands then ; and in the years that have followed, he certainly has not grown better. He is a bad man—a bad man."

The old man shook his head from side to side, and looked into the fire, as though displeased and worried, while Lucy sat silent, her eyes wandering from him to her lover, and back again.

"And how do *you* feel?" asked the latter, seating himself beside her, and taking her hand.

"I think I have not the fear that seems to trouble father," she replied, speaking the name she generally applied to the old gentleman.

"I hope there is no cause for either of you being troubled about the presence of this Overton. Remember how near the day is that you shall be my own."

A blush overspread the countenance of the young maiden, while her splendid blue eyes, turned up to Dudley, were eloquent with the affection too unfathomable for utterance. She made no resistance to his fervent embrace, and turned a willing cheek to the lips that were constantly pressing against it. She had perfect confidence, full faith, in the honour and integrity of her lover. Although a few months previous he had been an entire stranger, and although he was educated and accomplished in all the refinements of civilization, and she was nothing but a "wild-wood lass," still her assurance of his devotion was perfect. Their several months' acquaintance had been characterized by the most unexceptionable attention upon his part ; nor, in all their intercourse, had she been made to feel her shortcomings of education.

"How long since you have seen this fellow?" asked Dudley, after a few minutes' silence.

"It is now over a week. Father was with me then, so that he was not very troublesome in his attentions."

"He was rather careful of what he said or did, of course."

"More than that he had taken the occasion to tell me that he was going off a great distance to Canada to remain a great while."

"What did you reply?"

"I merely wished him a pleasant journey, and told him not to hurry back on my account."

"And how did that appear to please him?" asked Dudley with a smile.

"I shall never forget, to my dying day, the dark look which he bent upon me when I said that. I felt sorry immediately that I had been so imprudent."

"You did perfectly right. Did he say nothing more?"

"He left me shortly after, muttering something that I did not understand. He appeared to be in an ill-humour."

"You say you have not seen him since?"

"No."

"I ask you these questions, dearest Lucy, not out of idle or jealous curiosity, but that I may learn all that I can of this man, so that, if he really does intend any thing, I shall be prepared for it."

A black boy now entered, bearing in the breakfast from the kitchen, while Lucy arose and arranged the dishes upon a table spread in the midst of the apartment. And, before proceeding further with our narrative, we deem it our duty to acquaint the reader with by-gone events, a knowledge of which is necessary to a correct understanding of this history. But these matters are of sufficient importance to require a new chapter.

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## CHAPTER V.

## THE FOREST HOME AND ITS DRAMA

" A breaking surge, with forceful sway,  
 Two next Arion furious tears away  
 Hurl'd in the crags, behold, they gasp ! they bleed !  
 And groaning cling upon th' illusive weed.  
 Another billow burst in boundless roar !  
 Arion sinks, and memory views no more ! "

FALCONER, "*The Shipwreck.*"

UPWARD of fifteen years had now elapsed since Enoch Sedley emigrated to the wilds of the Ohio. He was accompanied by a son, a stout youth, just entering the verge of manhood ; and a sister, a matron some few years junior to himself, bearing in her arms an infant scarce two years old. The whole group were clad in mourning, which, not more than the fixed dejection of the elder Sedley, and the wan cheeks and tearful eyes of his sister, denoted that some heavy calamity had befallen them. Their tale is briefly told.

Sedley had been a sailor. After many years spent in his hazardous vocation, he had succeeded in gathering together a small property, with which he was returning from a Southern port, where his wife and children had passed the winter months, to his native place, intending to trust the seas no more. The husband of his sister, who was interested with him in the voyage, was also on board. They had reached within a few hours' sail of their destination, when a storm arose, which soon put a fatal termination to the plans of life the mind of Sedley had fondly busied itself in framing. The vessel, deeply laden, was not long able to sustain the fury of the tempest ; and the tortured parent was doomed to see his wife and one of his two children sink before his eyes, while, almost in the same moment, his brother-in-law was washed off by a wave and carried in an instant beyond the reach of succor. Sedley and his son were rescued from the wreck a day or two after, the former in a state of despondency bordering upon madness. Returning to his desolate home, the

bearer of the sad tidings to his widowed sister, he was seized with an illness which for some weeks seriously threatened his life. The natural strength of his constitution, hardened by long habits of activity, at last triumphed; but on his recovery he could not bear to remain amid scenes where every object reminded him of his loss; and, gathering up the small relics of his property, he emigrated to the West. His cup of affliction, however, was not yet full. He had resided there but a few years, when both his son and sister fell victims to one of those epidemic fevers which sometimes made sad havoc among the early settlers in that luxuriant region. The care and attention required by the lovely orphan—the only child of his widowed sister, left by this event to his sole guardianship—in some measure tended to divert his mind and blunt the edge of anguish; and the little prattler herself, too young to know the full extent of her loss, seemed to strive by every engaging art of childhood to win her uncle from despondency.

As she grew up toward womanhood, Lucy Dayton exhibited traits of personal loveliness which few maidens could have rivaled, and a degree of intelligence not often surpassed by those who have had greater opportunities of mental culture. Though so young when her mother died, the early precepts and instructions of that exemplary woman probably had not been without their effect in forming her character; as the dews of early spring exert an unseen influence in promoting the luxuriance of summer. Her books, almost her only companions, had been perused with an understanding spirit; and by these her mind had been stored and her taste cultivated to a degree that formed a beautiful contrast with the native simplicity of her manners, and the artless freshness of her unsophisticated sentiments. Her person was small, well-formed, and graceful; and her face was lighted with that sweet expression which has been well called the “sunshine of the heart.”

It is a homely saying, as old as homely, and, like a good many old saws, more venerable for its antiquity than its truth, that beauty is but skin deep. He who thinks so

knows little of the essential principle of loveliness. True comeliness consists not in mere regularity of features, symmetry of shape, the transparency of the complexion, or the hue and brilliancy of the eye. There must be something within "which passeth show." The source of beauty—that is, of the best and most enduring kind of beauty—lies deeper than these ; its fountain is the soul. It is

"The mind, the music breathing from the face,"

to use a line of Lord Byron's, which some critic has objected to, but which, if its meaning be difficult to explain, its truth, at least, every one must have *felt*.

Of this description was the beauty of Lucy Dayton. Her features were, indeed,

"——— The great soul's apparent seat."

In all moods her countenance was lovely, for its expression always was pure and sweet—the direct emanation from a mind that knew no evil. The softness and delicacy of her manners might have seemed additionally charming from their strong contrast with the coarser bearing of the surrounding settlers, as the diamond shines the brightest in an Ethiop's ear.

Reared in the deep seclusion of the forest,

"One rose of the wilderness left on its stalk,  
To mark where a garden had been,"

she knew nothing of the great world beyond the imperfect notions gathered from her little library, or from the tales of his former adventures with which her uncle would sometimes beguile the long hours of a winter evening. But, though thus shut out from the abodes of men, this "little Western flower" had not been without admirers among the settlers, one of whom, at least, had sought to transplant her to his own garden. In plainer phrase, the beauty of Lucy had captivated the heart of Edward Overton, a lawless fellow, half hunter, half boatman, in which latter capacity he was supposed to have amassed considerable wealth. This circumstance, however, seemed of more consequence in his own eyes

than those of Mr. Sedley, whom it did not influence to favor his suit, while his niece shrunk from the advances of the rude backwoodsman with a feeling of abhorrence she could not conceal.

About this time Charles Dudley arrived at Adrianopolis, and, forming an acquaintance with Sedley, it was not long before he became a frequent and welcome visitor at his cabin—the charms of the old man's niece, as the reader will readily believe, constituting at least a portion of the attraction. Her gentle manners, her ingenuousness, and the sweet mixture of intelligence and simplicity that characterized her conversation, rendered her exceedingly interesting to Dudley, who was but recently from the circles of an Eastern city, where he had been heartily fatigued with the frivolities, and sickened at the artificialness and sophistications of fashionable society. She, on her part, found much in him to admire: his manly beauty, his easy and courteous bearing, his knowledge of the world—that world, a fairy-land to her, to which her imagination often wandered, and where all appeared grand, gorgeous, and confused, like a child's vision of the future. Thus mutually pleased with each other, acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy, and an attachment insensibly grew up in their hearts, though the unconscious girl was hardly aware of the nature of her own sentiments, till they were made known to her by an avowal of love and offer of marriage from Dudley. Not to dwell on this part of our story, let it suffice to say that his suit was accepted, and that the day had now arrived on the evening of which they were to be united. For reasons which the young man had explained to the satisfaction of the parties, it had been arranged that the nuptials should be private, with no witness beyond the clergyman who was to unite them—a young missionary, who chanced to be staying a few weeks at Adrianopolis.

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Thus engaged, at times “prattling out of tune,” and silent at times from the very overfullness of their hearts, the hours of the morning slipped pleasantly away, and the lessened shadows of the tall trees before the cabin showed that it was

nearly noon, ere Dudley mustered resolution to tear himself from his affianced bride, and leave her to complete her preparations for their nuptials. Again and again he turned to say something he had not thought before, or to repeat something he had already said a dozen times; till, at last, every excuse for delay exhausted, he departed in good earnest. Hurrying along the path as if he feared to trust his resolution at a more leisurely pace, he soon disappeared from the following gaze of Lucy, as he descended the bluff toward Adrianopolis.

An hour or two after the departure of young Dudley from the house of Sedley, the inmates of the cabin, who had just completed their frugal dinner, heard the tramp of a horse, and, directly after, Hugh Overton rode up to the door. A piece of cleared land, which Mr. Sedley owned on the bank of the river some few miles above, and which he had been desirous of selling, had before been the subject of a conversation between him and Hugh; and it was in relation to this that the latter had ostensibly come.

"Hello, there!" called the horseman. "Is the old man in?"

"If by the *old man* you mean me, here I am," said Mr. Sedley, making his appearance at the door.

Overton laughed at his joke, and added:

"I've come to see you, 'Square, about that piece of land along the river that you want to sell. You know we've had some talk about it. Mind to go up and have a talk over it?"

"I will do so, willingly; but, are you in a great hurry?" asked Mr. Sedley.

"I am, rather. Why did you ask?"

"Well, you see," laughed the old gentleman, "I have important matters to attend to; and, if you were a mind to put it off for a day or two, why, I would take it as a great accommodation."

"*Very* important business! If it ain't impudent, I'll ask what it might be? No 'bjection to telling, I s'pose?"

"Oh, no; the truth is, my niece, Lucy, is to be married, and we are very busy making the arrangements."



The old man did not see the scowl that passed over the face of the horseman; but, concealing his emotions, Hugh Overton asked, with a matter-of-fact air:

"I s'pose young Dudley is the happy man?"

"Yes, of course; he is anxious to celebrate the affair, as he intends leaving very shortly. Couldn't you wait till the matter is over?"

"I should be glad, indeed, 'Square, to 'commodate you; but, you see, I've charge of my brother's keel-boat, and we'er just on the p'int of departure for New Orleans, so I've got to hurry through with my business here."

"How soon do you expect to go?"

"In six or eight hours, like enough."

"I will go with you, then. Cato! Cato!" called Mr. Sedley, looking around for his negro. "Where can that darkey be? He is hardly ever at hand when he is needed. Cato! Cato!"

By-and-by a faint voice, as if far beneath the surface of the earth, was heard, answering: "I's c-o-m-i-n-g; s-o-o-n be d-e-r-e, m-a-s-s-a"

"That black scamp is the greatest pest of my life. Only this morning he actually put a target up on our brindle cow's horn, and fired at it, killing the cow, as might have been expected."

"Here I is, massa," yelled the darkey in question, sailing around the corner of the house under full speed.

"Why do you run off? You know you are wanted continually, and why don't you remain about the house?"

"'Portant business dat had to be 'tended to. No postponement on 'count ob webber. Sorry to keep massa waitin'."

"No more talk, now. Put to the barn, as fast as those big feet of yours will carry you, and saddle the black horse and bring him here."

"Yah! yah! I's dar, puttin' on de saddle," replied the negro, trotting off toward the barn.

"I hope we shall be able to agree about the price," said Mr. Sedley, turning back toward Hugh Overton, who had sat smiling at the antics of the darkey.

"We come very near agreeing before—within a trifle, I believe. I suppose you are willing to come down a little from the price you asked when I last saw you?"

Mr. Sedley's face instantly sobered, and he gravely shook his head.

"I named the very lowest figure I could possibly take."

"Well, 'Square, that trifle shan't spile the bargain. If the land suits me, I'll give you the price named."

"You've had a good view of it several times, and have expressed yourself well pleased, so that I am hopeful that the bargain will now be struck between us. You take charge of your brother's keel-boat, I believe?"

"Yes; I've navigated the Ohio and Mississippi so often that there aint many bends or bars in them but what I understand, so that my brother is hardly willing to trust his keel-boat to any one but me."

"You are considered about the best pilot we have in these parts, I believe?"

"And I make bold to say there are none better, though it's myself that says it, who shouldn't say it. I've navigated them rivers summat over twenty years, and it would be strange if I *didn't* know something of them by this time," replied Overton.

"There are some things of which, I suppose, you never can be correctly informed?"

"What's them?"

"The Mississippi snags and sawyers, that occasionally punch a hole through the bottom of the boats passing over them."

"There you're right, 'Square; there's no knowing about them snags. To-day you may have a good landing-place, and to-morrow the whole bottom may be covered up with them cussed snags. More'n once I've had the boat I'm on snagged so quick that it dropped to the bottom, and I had to swim for life, without stopping to see whether I was dressed or not. But a sawyer is the worst."

"I was not aware of that."

"Yes, a Mississippi sawyer is the worst by a long sight.

You see, a tree comes floating down; one end gets stuck in the bottom, and the other end p'int's upwards, to punch the boats coming along. I remember one night we tied to, at Natchez-under-the-hill, and unfastened a little afore daylight, and swung out into the stream. We'd gone about a mile, when I went down in the cabin to take a nap. I'd just flung myself on a hammock, and had got my eyelids to feeling rather heavy, when *whirr, sklip, shspang, bang*—up come the bottom of the boat, with an awful rush of muddy water, and I scrambled out of the cabin in a hurry, the water follering me up like a race-horse. I made a spring out into the yaller river, and after swimming a few rods looked back. All that was seen was that cussed sawyer lifting its bushy head out of the water, ready for the next boat that might come along."

"Were you the only one on the boat?"

"No; there was two besides myself—Ed Drake and Tom Maggod; but they were used to such things, and, being on deck when the boat struck, they got to shore afore I did. But it strikes me, 'Square, that darkey is a good while saddling your horse."

"Just what I was thinking. I say—"

"What the deuce is up?" interrupted the horseman.

The voice of Cato was heard at this moment inside of the barn, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Whoa, now, Roan; what ye 'bout dar? I'll teach you how to 'sult a gemman! Take dat, you nigger!" Then followed the sound of blows, and kicks, and squeals. "It's Mr. Cato dat you has in hand; dat's what I'm tryin' to 'press 'pon your understandin'. Whoa, now, I tell ye. Whoa!"

"He is in a quarrel with your horse," said Hugh Overton.

"I suppose so," replied Sedley, impatiently; and he was on the point of hurrying off to the barn to quell the tumult, when the horse leaped into sight, with the grinning, bare-headed negro upon his back.

"What have you been doing?" demanded Sedley, as the boy circled the animal around in true horsemanlike style, before bringing him to a halt.

"Been teaching ob dis brute manners to his s'periors."

"What has he been doing?"

"Chawed my hat up, dod blast him! He ain't no better nor a nigger."

Neither the old man nor Overton could restrain a smile at the anger of the negro.

"How came he to do it, Cato?" asked the horseman.

"I was flourishing around ob him, when I s'pose I happens to come too close, when he grabs my hat and goes to chawin' ob it up."

"You ought to have snatched it out of his mouth."

"Did try to, but de nigger tried to chaw my hand up."

"He didn't swallow your hat, did he?" asked Mr. Sedley.

"Reckon he did, but dis nigga cac'lates he didn't hold him down long. No, sah! yah! yah! yah! twan't long afore de hat come up agin!"

"Why haven't you it on?" asked the horseman, who seemed disposed to keep up the conversation while Mr. Sedley was securing the saddle-girths, and assuring himself that the head-gear was all right.

"I laid him out in de sun to git dry while I wallops de ole brute. De hat will be as good as ebber bime-by. Reckon dat hoss won't swaller it agin berry soon."

"There is no occasion for further delay, I believe," said Mr. Sedley, vaulting into the saddle as lightly as if he were but a mere boy. "Cato, remember to stay about the house until I return. I do not think we shall be gone a great while."

They were about to start, when Lucy appeared at the door and asked:

"How long before you will return, Mr. Sedley?"

"In an hour or two, I think. Perhaps I may be gone longer."

"Please return as soon as you can."

"Why, my child, you are not afraid to remain here alone, are you?"

"I would rather not," returned the maiden, speaking as though there were some weight upon her mind.

"If you have much fear, I will put off this negotiation until Mr. Overton returns."

"Oh! never mind," said the gentleman referred to, exhibiting considerable anxiety to leave the place. "The girl can have no cause for alarm. If I do not buy this piece of land to-day, you will lose the sale of it. She can not object to remaining with Cato until we return."

Lucy, who had overheard what was said, added:

"Do not let me detain you. Cato will stay here till you come back, I am sure."

"Yah! yah! dat so," replied the negro, turning a "handspring," as he spoke.

Thus reassured, Mr. Sedley rode off with Hugh Overton, although, it must be said, it was with considerable hesitation, for he was not satisfied in mind or spirit that all was right.

For a while after the departure of her uncle, Lucy found various matters to engage her attention. The negro-boy was dispatched to the village on a necessary errand; and in the ordering of her household affairs, two or three hours glided away—not, however, without her being agitated by that flutter of the spirits which, perhaps, every one who has been placed in like circumstances has experienced. At length, when all her arrangements were made, and the hour was drawing near when she was to be united indissolubly to the man who had won her maiden heart, this feeling of restlessness increased to a degree almost painful:

"Between the acting of a dreadful thing,  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream;"

and something akin to this feeling is experienced by every heart—especially by youthful ones—during that period of suspense which precedes the consummation of any important step. In vain Lucy opened her favorite volume, and endeavored to quiet her perturbation by reading passages which had often exercised a tranquilizing influence. The book had lost its wonted power. Her eye dwelt upon the page, but a thousand shifting emotions swelled in her bosom—a thousand fancies floated through her mind. She laid it aside, and, invited

by the balmy southern breeze, which came to her fraught with the sweets of her own garden, took down her bonnet from its accustomed nook, and wandered forth into the open air.

The yellow light of the sinking sun gave additional richness to the autumn drapery of the forest ; and as Lucy pursued a little footpath which wound round the northern brow of the bluff, the prospect which opened to her view on that side was one that, to an eye less familiar with its beauties, or less abstracted from the realities around, could not but have furnished a pleasing object of contemplation. Beneath her, the Ohio, sleeping between its banks, gave an air of delicious repose to the landscape which it mirrored. The forest, on the opposite side, leaning over the grassy brink, as if to view the reflection of its own gay and many-colored foliage in the stream—the little islands that here and there dotted the glassy surface—and fleecy clouds floating at intervals along a sky slightly tinged with a faint golden haze—these were but a few of the features that combined to give inexpressible loveliness to the scene.

But the mind of Lucy was too much absorbed with its own thoughts to heed the objects around her, or to listen to the flood of melody which innumerable warblers were pouring on the evening air. Her soul was wrapt in visions of the future, and a thousand vague fears and ineffable hopes thrilled through her heart. The man to whom her faith was pledged, and her hand was so soon to be united—would he be always true, always tender ? Their life—would it glide, like the stream before her, smoothly to its end, or would it be shaded with clouds and ruffled with storms ? The crowded and busy scenes to which she would probably soon be removed—would that world equal the world of her imaginings ? Should she there find objects on which her heart might repose, which would win her affections, and deserve her esteem ? And oh ! more than all, the love that had grown up in the forest—might it not expire in the city ?—might not the rustic, who had won the heart of Dudley in seclusion, be doomed to lose it in society, and be sadly taught that the wilderness of nature had been ill-exchanged for the wilderness of man ?

Musings like these possessed the mind of Lucy, till the deepening shadow on her path aroused her from abstraction, and warned her to retrace her steps. She had turned with this purpose, and was tripping lightly forward, when her ear was startled by a heavy footstep near at hand, and the burly form of Ned Overton, breaking through the screen of underwood and clambering vines that lined the path, presented itself before her. Lucy started at sight of him, and her heart sunk within her with an ominous foreboding of evil. There were tales told of the lawless life of the hunter which had always rendered him an object of abhorrence; and this feeling had been aggravated into apprehension by his morose bearing and certain vague threats which he was said to have uttered since the rejection of his suit. Had the nature of the ground permitted, she would gladly have turned aside from the path, so as to avoid the necessity of meeting. But this was hardly practicable, and she stepped quickly forward, intending to pass him with only a slight salutation, when her purpose was frustrated by his laying his hand rudely and with a strong grasp upon her shoulder.

"No, no, Miss Lucy, you don't git cl'ar this time!" said Overton, his small, keen eyes twinkling with an expression that made her shudder.

"What is your purpose, Mr. Overton? Let go your hand—release me, sir!—I have business—my father—"

"Your father—ha, ha! he's safe enough. Hugh has took good care of that."

"Merciful heaven!" exclaimed Lucy, "am I the object, then, of premeditated outrage?"

"There's no time for talking now, girl; you must go with me, that's the upshot of the business. No harm is meant, if you behave quiet—no worse harm than making you the wife of a Kentuck' ranger, and so keep you from the d—d Yankee varmint that's been cavorting round you."

"Unhand me, Edward Overton," exclaimed the terrified Lucy, her sweet voice trembling with agitation, as she vainly struggled to release herself from the strong grasp of the

hunter. "Unhand me, I say!—you will repent this—the house is not so distant but that my screams—"

But before she had time to put her half-uttered threat into execution (though it would have been of no avail had it been otherwise), her mouth was rudely stopped by the hunter, who hastily bound a handkerchief tightly round her face, so as to prevent utterance. Then raising her in his arms as easily as a child might its waxen doll, he struck into the woods, and hurried along at a pace that seemed not at all impeded by the ineffectual struggles of the maiden. In her efforts to release herself from his arms, Lucy's hat had fallen to the ground, and her long auburn hair, freed from confinement, floated round her pallid features, heightening the expression of terror which they wore. Her bosom, too, partly bared by her kerchief being torn from her neck, rose and fell with a quick, panting motion, which betrayed the tumultuous fears that agitated her heart. The hunter paused not to recover the fallen garments, but striding rapidly forward, soon came to a place where a horse, tied to a tree, was cropping the scattered blades of grass that sprouted up between the withered leaves. Throwing his long legs across the saddle, and placing the maiden before him, he struck his spurs into the flanks of the animal, and set off at a round gallop through the forest.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PURSUIT AND ITS TRAGEDY.

"He stops near his bower—his eye perceives  
Strange traces along the ground—  
At once to the earth his burden he heaves,  
He breaks through the veil of boughs and leaves,  
And gains its door with a bound."—BRYANT.

THE sun had set behind the range of hills that lined the western horizon, and the shades of night, hastened in its



advance by the deep foliage of the overarching trees, had begun to settle upon the unfrequented road that wound through the wood, when Enoch Sedley came trotting along on his return toward his cabin. His horse seemed something jaded, and the face of its rider, as dimly revealed in the obscure light, showed a fatigued and dissatisfied expression, as if the object of his ride had not resulted to his wishes. Such an inference might also have been drawn from the half-uttered phrases which now and then fell from his lips, as he urged the horse forward with those impatient exclamations which belated travelers are wont to use. He had reached within a mile of his abode, and had broken the animal from its hard trot into that artificial and more pleasant gait called racking, when a turn of the road brought him in sight of a pedestrian, who was staggering along at a little distance before him. He came up with him as the latter was beginning to climb a hill, the steepness of which obliged the horseman also to slacken his pace.

"Is it you, Sawyer?" said the old man, as he recognized the figure. "Why, Overton told me you were going with him as patron,\* on his trip to New Orleans."

"So I am," answered the boatman, in a thick, foggy voice, that showed he had been drinking.

"But he was anxious to get under way, as the river is falling so fast, and meant to set off before sunset."

"So he did, I reckon," replied the boatman.

"Then you do not go with him?"

"Yes I do, though."

"If you mean to overtake the boat, you will need to walk faster than you are doing at present," said the old man, in a mild voice.

"Leave me alone for that," rejoined the other. "I know what I know. The ridge road over the bluffs to the Round Bend is as straight as a loon's leg. I shall come up with the craft in that place; for you see, 'twixt you and me (but it's a great secret), that's where she is to wait for sulky Ned to come aboard."

\* The steersmen of keel-boats on the western rivers are called patrons.

"Do you mean Edward Overton," demanded the old man, in a tone of awakened interest.

"Sartain—sure I mean Ned Overton—who the devil else could I mean?"

"But you surely are mistaken. Hugh goes with the boat; his brother has set off for Canada."

"Canada be d—d!" exclaimed the drunken boatman. "I tell you that's all a flam: he's going to Orleans with us; and all I wonder is, what's kept the h—l-cat sneaking round here these two days, like a 'possum in a hen-roost, when the boat was all loaded, and the river falling every minute. Some wild spree or other, I'll be bound."

Enoch Sedley stayed to ask no further question. He had not yet ascended more than half-way up the hill, and the remaining portion was of greater steepness than that which was passed. But a sudden apprehension of evil seemed to have seized his mind, and striking his heels into his horse's side, and jerking him smartly by the bridle, he urged him once more into a faster gait. In a few moments he reached a place where a small path diverged from the road toward the brow of the bluff, along which it ran in the direction of his own cabin. On turning into this, an opening among the trees let in the twilight, and something which lay in the path before him attracting his attention, he sprung from his horse, and raised it from the ground. It was the bonnet of his niece; and a little further on, her white kerchief, pure as the bosom it had lately covered, lay like a thin snow-curl on the grass. The old man, with the experienced eye of one whose long habitation in the woods had led him to be a heedful and shrewd observer of the slightest traces, cast a quick, knowing glance around, as if with the purpose of discovering some further evidence of the nature of the violence he feared had been committed. Beneath a dogwood bush that stood near the path, the number of fresh scarlet leaves that strewed the ground seemed greater than could well have been scattered by the gentle southern breeze; and one of its smaller branches, newly broken, and stripped of its leaves and twigs, betrayed the grasp of a struggling hand. Sedley scarcely paused to make

these observations ; his practised eye, sharpened by apprehension, detected them as he hurried toward his cabin. On reaching it, he strode into the deserted apartment, and in a loud and earnest voice called upon his niece. No answer was returned, and his heart sunk within him as he once more, but in a fainter tone, repeated her name. For a single moment Sedley stood with his head drooped upon his breast, and his hands pressed to his forehead, as if stunned by the blow which threatened to deprive him—and by means worse than death—of the last member of his family, the last prop and solace of his declining age. Then, gathering himself in his strength, and his eye kindling with a determined expression, he rushed out of the cabin, sprung upon his horse, pushed the animal into immediate speed, and rattled down the path which led toward the village.

The place spoken of by the boatman as the Round Bend was a turn in the river, some seven or eight miles below Adrianopolis, by the winding course of the stream, though hardly more than five by a road that ran along the ridge or summit of the bluffs which form the background of our scene, and intersected the Ohio at that place. A road from the village communicated with the above, by winding up the point or spur of one of the bluffs, about midway between Adrianopolis and the cabin of Sedley. On a little natural mound at the foot of this spur stood the block house which has been before alluded to.

It was toward the ridge road that Sedley directed his course. The information that Edward Overton had not departed for Canada, as he had been led to believe, but had been lurking in the neighborhood, and was now about to set off clandestinely for New Orleans, considered in connection with facts previously known, had aroused apprehensions in the old man's mind, which soon received painful confirmation from the evidence of outrage he discovered. He now plainly perceived, what he had half suspected before, that Hugh Overton's plan of purchase was a mere pretence ; and that he had been duped and drawn away from home, in order to facilitate the schemes of the lawless hunter. Sedley bit his lip as these reflections

passed through his mind, and urging his horse at each moment to a greater speed, he rode furiously up the stony hill. As he drew near the point where the road which ascended the long promontory or spur of the bluff turned into that which traversed the summit, the noise of a wagon coming down the declivity reached his ear, and in a moment the two travellers met.

The full, round moon was by this time rising in the east ; but the tall black trees threw too deep a gloom over the road to allow of their recognizing, scarcely of their distinguishing each other. The wagoner drew up his horse, cleared his voice, and seemed disposed to enter into conversation. But the old man dashed by him without an instant's pause, unmindful of the "I say, neighbor!—hem!—friend, hello!" with which the other saluted him.

"Well, now, I guess that's going it," said the nasal voice of Nathan Dodge, as he chattered to his Rosinante, and resumed his descent toward the village. "I wonder who it can be, and where he's streaking it off to at that mad rate. Well, he didn't show much bringing up, any how. He might have stopped long enough to give a body the time of day : it wouldn't a-cost nothing." And so saying Nathan resumed the mellifluous tune of Old Hundred, which he had been piously "whistling as he went ;" not exactly, like Dryden's swain, "for want of thought," but as one mode of letting off his inexhaustible flow of animal spirits.

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The circumstance of meeting a traveler in the ridge road at that time in the evening was unusual, and had also proved a greater hindrance to the ravisher than to his pursuer. The restive animal which the hunter bestrode had previously shown symptoms of impatience at being obliged to carry two riders instead of one, of which fact he was probably made aware more by the strugglings of Lucy than her weight. The fretting and curveting of his horse had delayed Overton's progress to a degree that excited his irritable temper ; and when, soon afterward, the noise of Nathan Dodge's wagon

heard approaching, his vexation found vent in a deep-muttered curse.

Fearful of continuing along the road, however, lest his person should be recognized, and his plans defeated, he struck into the wood, and making a long circuit round the side of the bluff, did not ascend into the path again until the wagon had passed so far that the sound of its wheels was no longer audible.

But a more serious cause of alarm now reached his ears. The delay occasioned by these different interruptions had enabled Sedley to gain upon the hunter ; and he had now drawn so near that the trampling of his horse's hoofs, as they clattered and clinked over the flinty ridge, began to be distinctly heard. A deep scowl darkened the face of the ruffian, as, after a moment of intense listening, his mind became assured of the nature of the sounds which reached him through the silent air. He cast his eyes round with a quick, perplexed glance, as if uncertain what course to pursue. The part of the road he had now gained traversed the center of a long narrow ridge ; the ground on either side descending so abruptly that the trees which grew at a little distance hardly extended their tops to a level with the summit. To ride down the steep bank would be an adventure full of peril ; but should he proceed along the road, he must soon be overtaken, as the pursuer was evidently gaining upon him, and the noise of his horse sounded each instant nearer and nearer.

In the meanwhile, the struggles of poor Lucy, whose quick ears had not failed to distinguish the distant trampling, and in whose heart it had awakened a hope of rescue, greatly embarrassed him. The hunter knew not what to do, and in his perplexity turned his horse's head to the edge of the bank and spurred him forward, as if determined to plunge down the declivity at all hazards. But the animal, frightened at the steepness of the dark descent, started back, and whirled round on his hinder feet with a caracole so sudden and violent as would inevitably have thrown a less practised rider to the ground.

Foiled in this attempt, he leaped from the saddle, and, throwing the bridle over the branch of a tree at the roadside, he raised the maiden in his arms, and sprung down the descent; till, reaching a small level place, or rather hollow, in the side of the bank, occasioned by the fall of a huge, uprooted oak, he hastily bound the girl to one of the jagged points of the tree. This done, he clambered as swiftly as possible up the hillside, remounted his horse, and, reining him into an easy gallop, continued along the road.

The approaching horseman had by this time drawn so near that the two were only prevented from seeing each other by an intervening bend in the road. This was quickly passed by the pursuer, and the old man came suddenly in sight of the wretch whom he had so much ground for believing had stolen away his niece. It was the wish of the hunter, no doubt, to assume an appearance of unconcern, as if unconscious of any offence; yet, guilty-like, he continued to gallop forward, unable to summon sufficient effrontery to turn and face the person he had injured. The loud voice of the old man now rung through the arches of the forest, calling upon the villain to halt. Thus commanded, Overton paused, and was yet in the act of wheeling his horse, when Enoch Sedley rode up to his side.

"Where is my child, my Lucy? Villain, give me my child!" cried he in a voice of terrible energy, seizing, as he spoke, the burly form of Overton by the collar.

"What should I know about your child?" muttered the hunter, seeking to release himself from the grasp. "What should I care about her? If she is gone, she has run off with the Yankee, I reckon."

"Villain, you lie! you have stolen her away—you thought to carry her to New Orleans, and force her to your purposes—you have her now secreted in these woods. Oh, lead me to her! No, no, you shall not shake me off—lead me to her! Oh, give me back my child!"

"Look here, Enoch Sedley, hold off your hands. I haven't got your niece—I don't know nothing about her. If the gal's gone, ask the Yankee for her; he'll be willing to return

the old man stooped down, and grasping a fold of the hunter's garments, dragged the heavy, lifeless mass a little way down the brow of the declivity. Returning to the road, he seized the rein of his horse, and in like manner leading the animal down the side of the hill, was immediately swallowed up in the deep blackness which the trees cast upon the earth.

## CHAPTER VII.

### RECOVERED.

“ For this is alone in  
 Thy power to declare,  
 That in the dim forest  
 Thou heardest a low moaning,  
 And foundest a bright lady surpassingly fair ;  
 And didst bear her home with thee in love and in charity,  
 To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.”—COLBRIDGE.

ACCOMPANIED by the missionary who was to perform the marriage rite, Charles Dudley reached the cottage of Enoch Sedley not long after the latter had set out in pursuit of the hunter. As they rode up to the gate, Charles was surprised that no light shone from the windows of the cabin to welcome him. The house lay in deep shadow, and but for a low sobbing sound that broke the stillness, might have seemed wholly uninhabited. Alarmed by these circumstances, our hero pricked his horse forward, and in a moment was at the door. The sobbing proceeded from the negro boy, who had just returned from the village. He sat on a step of the little vine-covered porch, and was weeping as if his heart would break.

“ What is the matter, Cato ? ” demanded Charles, in a voice slightly shaken by vague apprehensions.

“ Oh-o-o ! ” sobbed the negro, in a fresh burst of grief that rendered his speech nearly inarticulate—“ is 'e you, massa

Dudley—oh-o ! Missy Lucy, Missy Lucy!—gone for ebber—gone for ebber !”

“Great God ! what means this ?” exclaimed Charles, springing from his horse and rushing past the boy into the cabin. But all was dark and silent there. The brands on the hearth had fallen, and were smouldering away in a bed of their own white ashes, while the flickering glimmer which they fitfully shed served only to show that the room was deserted. Charles turned again to the door.

“Cato, for heaven’s sake, Cato, tell me what has chanced !” cried he, with a huskiness of voice that showed he was greatly moved.

“Oh, Massa Dudley, Missy Lucy is carried off ! Ned Oberton hab run away wid her ! I seen him as I come by de block house wid a woman on afore. I t’ought den t’was young missy—I is sartain now.”

This intelligence thrilled like a bolt of ice to Dudley’s heart. In a hoarse, low tone, scarcely louder than a whisper, yet of that kind which makes the hearer start, he demanded of the negro, as he flung himself upon his horse, which road the hunter had taken ; and before the question was half-answered, plunging his spurs to the rowel-head, and reining his steed suddenly round with the skill of an accomplished rider, he darted off in pursuit. The voice of the astonished missionary, as he called to him to know what course he should take, scarcely reached the furious horseman, so rapidly did he fly along the path.

At the foot of the bluff Dudley encountered the peddler, who had just finished his slow and careful descent, and was turning the head of his weary beast toward Adrianopolis.

“Hallo, Dodge !” cried Charles, who recognized the other as he drove out in the broad moonlight, “did you meet Edward Overton on the road ?”

The peddler, ever ready to enter into chat, reined up his horse.

“Ha, Squire Dudley, is that you ? A good evening to you. Has any thing bad happened ?”

“Answer me, Dodge, did you meet Overton ?” asked the young man, impatiently.



“ Well, now, I sort o’ guess I did. I met some one that was streaking it off mighty fast, I tell you. Can’t exactly say who it was ; but raily, now, I shouldn’t be surprised if it was Ned Overton.”

“ Had he a female on the horse with him ? ”

“ Well, I can’t say he hadn’t. I rather calculate there was some one on with him. But raily, now, this is mighty strange ! Has he been doing any thing ?—has any thing happened ?—has—has—”

But the hoofs of Dudley’s horse were rattling at a distance before honest Nathan had got half through the string of questions he wished to propose. Wondering what the pursuit meant, and thinking he should be able to learn something of the cause at the village, or perhaps be the first to spread the news—an object scarcely less desirable—he cracked his whip, and proceeded on his way at a brisker pace than he had hitherto thought prudent. The jingling of his tin-ware died away as he passed into the distance, and deep silence again settled over the neighborhood of the old block-house.

Dudley was not long in gaining the point where the road up the spur of the bluff communicated with that which ran along the summit of the ridge. Here for a moment he seemed at a loss which way to turn. But his quick mind revolving the different circumstances which had come to his knowledge connected with the recent movements of Overton, he rightly concluded that the pretended expedition to Canada was a story invented to conceal the real nature of his designs, and lead pursuit in the wrong direction. Turning, therefore, to the southward, he gave the rein to his horse, and moved swiftly forward. He had proceeded perhaps about a mile, when his ear—straining with intense attention in the hope to distinguish the tramp of the fugitive—became conscious of a low murmuring sound, not unlike the effort of a half-stifled human voice. He reined up his horse, and stooping in his stirrups, bent his head down to listen. The sound was repeated, and seemed to come from the deep valley beside the road. In an instant Dudley had sprung to the ground and was standing at the brink of the descent.

“Lucy!” he cried aloud, “Lucy Dayton, is it you I hear?—and where, where are you?”

A scream of joy and surprise burst from the lips of the maiden as the well-known voice of Dudley thrilled upon her ear. The sound, though deadened by the bandage bound round her mouth, was yet loud enough to be distinctly heard by him who was anxiously listening for a reply. He did not pause for further answer, but eagerly leaped down the bank. His first spring admonished him, but without effect, of the necessity of caution; for his head coming in violent contact with the outstretched arm of a low, gnarled tree, was only saved from a severe contusion by the thickness of its covering. Continuing his precipitate descent, a few active bounds brought him beside the captive. He soon emerged into the moonlight, bearing her in his arms.

“Ah! Charles,” whispered the trembling Lucy, upturning her pale face to her lover, and showing by the motion, as the light streamed on her features, that they wore an expression of the most intense anxiety—“Ah! Charles, there have been dreadful doings among these wild hills to-night. A different meeting this—oh, how widely different!—from that which we so fondly, so confidently anticipated.”

“Be not alarmed, my dear, my gentle Lucy,” answered Dudley, in a soothing voice; “the plans of the villain have been defeated—you are happily rescued; and you have one beside you now able to defend you—one who will leave you no more. The clergyman waits for us, Lucy. Let us return, and before him and your uncle—”

“Oh, my uncle, Charles,” interrupted the maiden, “my soul is filled with darkest apprehensions for him. Have you seen nothing—have you heard nothing?”

“Nothing, dearest Lucy—what is it that you fear?”

“The worst that could befall! He is near at hand, Charles—alive or slain, he is somewhere near us.”

Lucy then related in brief and rapid terms the events which had passed within her hearing, and Dudley listened to the story with a deeply thoughtful brow. As she concluded, he asked:

"Are you certain, Lucy, that your uncle was the pursuer?" asked Dudley.

"Oh, too certain," answered she. "On overtaking the wretch, he cried to him in a loud voice to halt. I could not be mistaken in that voice—though I never before heard it exerted in so fierce a tone. Sounds of strife, mingled with deep imprecations from the hunter, then reached me; and presently a loud yell was uttered, so wild, so shrill, so piercing, that it still rings in my ears. Then all was silent; nor was the dreadful silence broken until I heard, afar off, the galloping of your horse."

"And the shriek—whose voice did that seem?"

"I can not tell—it was a horrid, unearthly sound, such as a strong man might utter in mortal agony. Oh, Charles," continued Lucy (and as she clung to him, Dudley felt that she trembled in every limb), "I fear some dreadful thing has happened—that blood has been spilt—and it may be life destroyed. Perhaps my generous, my noble-hearted uncle has been slain—perhaps—"

But she was unable to give utterance to the dark fear which disturbed her mind, and hiding her face in Dudley's bosom, a flood of tears came to the relief of her throbbing heart.

"Dear Lucy, be comforted. These torturing surmises may have no foundation. The sounds which reached you were distant, and you may have been deceived as to their nature. Your uncle even now may be returned—"

"Oh, Charles! this was to have been our wedding-night," interrupted Lucy, "and I was so happy!"

"And will be happy again, and have many long, long years of happiness," said Dudley, pressing the maiden to his bosom. "Trust me, this cloud will pass away. The wretch who has occasioned us this anxiety shall be brought to justice. Your uncle will witness and bless our union, and remove with us to a land where villains like this wild hunter dare not commit their depredations. Yes, Lucy," continued he, in a gentle and encouraging tone, kissing the pale forehead of the maiden as he spoke, "we shall all be very, very happy yet."

"Hark!" whispered she, throwing back her hair that she might listen, "did you not hear a trampling as of a horse?"

"It is my own horse, dearest; see, yonder he stands, waiting for us to mount him, and return to your home—"

"No, not return—at least not yet. Let us first seek my uncle—he can not be far from this. Perhaps he is wounded, and requires aid; perhaps—he is dead! Let us know the worst."

Dudley complied with the maiden's request, and seating her with him on the horse, they proceeded to search for the old gentleman.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A SAD ASSEMBLY.

"'Yet, yet in this affliction,' said  
The young man to the silent maid,  
'Yet, lady, Heaven is good—the night  
Shows yet a star which is most bright;  
Your uncle lives—he lives—is come  
Perhaps already to his home;  
Then let us leave this dreary place.'  
She yielded."—THE WHITE DOG OF RYLSTONE.

DUDLEY and Lucy were not long in reaching an eminence that commanded a considerable prospect. The moon was near the full, and was now shining down from the mid-heaven with a clear, bright light upon the road, which stretched for the greater part of a mile almost in a straight line. As far as the eye could reach, nothing interrupted the deep solitude of the scene. The leaves of the trees on either side, silvered by the gentle beams, scarcely stirred in the fanning south wind, and deep patches of shadow slept beneath, in some places extending in long black masses nearly across the road. A bend or sweep of the river was dimly seen on the left, shining on its course; and on the right, the eye overlooked a vast

and seemingly interminable forest. It was a scene, the silent, sweet influence of which, under other circumstances, would have crept into their hearts, and awakened there a gush of pure, and sweet, and holy emotions—which would have disposed them to that delicious communion of hearts allied, when love needs no language but “the pressure of the thrilling hand”—when thought answers thought, and pulse beats responsively to pulse. But they looked upon it now with minds absorbed with deep and painful emotions, and its quiet beauty gave them no pleasure.

“It is the soul that sees; the outward eyes  
Present the object, but the mind descries;  
And thence delight, disgust, or cool indifference rise.  
When minds are joyful, then we look around,  
And what is seen is all on fairy ground;  
Again they sicken, and on every view  
Cast their own dull and melancholy hue;  
Or, if absorbed by their peculiar cares,  
The vacant eye on viewless matter glares.”

“Perhaps,” whispered Dudley, as they stood there gazing on the objects before them, the eyes of Lucy peering among the trees, as if she would pierce the leafy veil that hid the secrets of the ravines from her knowledge—“Perhaps, Lucy, even while we are anxiously searching for your uncle here, he may have returned to his cabin, and be filled with equal anxiety on account of our absence. Let us return; and should we find that our hope deceives us, I need not say that I will depart in search of him, and leave no means untried to discover him, and bring to punishment the lawless wretch who has occasioned us all this anxiety. But first, Lucy, let me see you in a place of safety, where you may get needful rest after the agonizing and perilous adventure of this evening.”

The maiden offered no further objection to this course, though her bosom was not at all relieved of the fears that pressed heavily on her heart. On their way, Dudley endeavored to reassure her, by urging such suggestions of hope and comfort as occurred to his mind; but a weight was upon the spirits of both which could not be easily removed. As they thus rode toward the cottage, each engaged with earnest and

harrowing reflections, what a contrast they presented with themselves as the morning of that day had found them ! Then light, gay, buoyant—their hearts filled with hope, their eyes glistening with pleasure—a thousand bright visions of the future flitting through their minds—the sun did not shine in all his compass upon a happier pair. Now, how changed were their emotions ! the bosom of Dudley boiling with suppressed rage toward the ravisher, and his mind busy in framing schemes of vengeance ; that of Lucy agitated with forebodings of evil to her uncle, her more than father, of a nature so dreadful that a tremor shook her whole frame as she contemplated the wide-spread consequences which might result from it. A few hours before, and there seemed not a cloud in all their sky ; now their sun had gone down in darkness, and shadows and storms were gathering around their path. Such is human life !

As Charles and Lucy came near the block house, they were met by the missionary. On being left at the cabin, he had remained for a while in a state of amazement which prevented immediate action, and at last had ridden forth, though without a very definite notion of any manner in which he could render himself serviceable. A few yards in advance of him was the negro boy, whose anxiety had also drawn him upon the road. The joy which the poor lad felt at sight of his recovered mistress seemed too great for words, and displayed itself in a thousand extravagant capers. He ran to her, and caught her by the hand ; he laughed and cried in the same moment ; he sprung to and fro with the agility of an ape, and throwing himself upon the ground, rolled over and over with all the frolic wildness of a playful spaniel.

The party had been in the cabin but a few minutes, when a horseman alighted at the door, and directly after Mr. Sedley entered the room. Lucy sprung to him, cast one anxious, searching glance into his countenance, and then, burying her face in his garments, clung to him, and wept aloud. The old man bent his gray head over her fragile form, which he clasped convulsively to his heart, and gazed on her with a fixed look ; but no answering tear moistened his hot lids. His cheek

was pale, his lip bloodless, his dress disordered, and the bewildered, abstracted expression of his eye might either have denoted the absence of a fatigued and listless mind, or

“ Bespoke remembrance only too profound.”

An air of embarrassment and restraint was visible in each member of the group. Lucy, who knew the fearless and determined, though ordinarily gentle character of her uncle, had read in the single glance with which she perused his pallid face the confirmation of her worst apprehensions. Charles, afraid to ask any question or make any remark, lest it might lead to a disclosure of circumstances of which it would be well to keep the missionary ignorant and unsuspecting, sat gazing on the decaying embers with a restless, perturbed expression, that partly revealed what was passing in his mind. The missionary sat twiddling his hat in his hand, his sharp elbows projecting at acute angles from his sides, and his large eyes turning from one person to another with a look of exceeding and almost ludicrous perplexity. This person, however, was the first to break silence. Stroking down his smooth, close-shaven hair with his large, bony hand, he inquired with a somewhat sheepish air, if they should proceed to consummate the business which had brought him to the cabin.

“ Not to-night—not to-night!” exclaimed Lucy. “ No no, Charles,” continued she, in answer to the glance of her lover, “ to-morrow—or the next day—or some other time; but not to-night.”

“ But, dear Lucy,” whispered Dudley, “ why not put our union beyond the reach of villany to prevent?—why not give me that title to watch over and protect you, which, had it been earlier given, might have prevented the occurrences of this night? Let us leave nothing to uncertainty—nothing to chance, dearest Lucy.”

But the fervid entreaties of Dudley were on this occasion ineffectual to move the maiden from her resolve. Her limbs were fatigued, she said—her heart heavy, her mind harrassed and not in a proper frame to enter upon the deeply-important engagements he urged her to. Lucy’s countenance corrobora-

rated her words. It was pale, and its expression denoted trouble and fatigue; her large blue eyes floated in dewy moisture, as if the lids were filled with tears, which were only restrained by a strong effort of the will from gushing forth; and her whole appearance was indicative of a degree of suffering which gave irresistible force to her objections.

The missionary departed, and soon after the inmates of the cabin retired to their several apartments.

The house for more than an hour had been wrapt in profound stillness, when a door in the rear of the dwelling was slowly opened, and the figure of a man stole softly out. An angle of the building threw a deep shadow on the ground in the direction of his path, along which he trod with a stealthy step, till he disappeared behind a row of trees that skirted an avenue communicating with the outhouses. In a few minutes after, the same person reappeared from the stable, leading a horse, which he mounted and rode into the woods.

## CHAPTER IX.

### “MURDER WILL OUT.”

“ Around me are the stars and waters,  
Worlds mirrored in the ocean; goodlier sight  
Than torches glared back by a gaudy glass.

All is gentle—naught  
Stirs rudely; but, congenial with the night,  
Whatever moves is gliding like a spirit.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hark! what is that? or who, at such a moment?”—BYRON.

THE Ohio river, as shown in the broad moonlight on the evening of our narrative, presented a picture softer, and not less lovely, than when it basked in the full glare of the morning sun. The southern breeze, though light, yet blowing in opposition to the current, had fretted its smooth surface into innumerable ripples, which curled, and danced, and



glittered in the silvery beams like fairies sporting away the still hours of night. The moon, now somewhat declined into the western sky, had left the Ohio shore in shadow; but the wide sea of foliage on the opposite bank was still bathed in light, save where checkered by the figure of a passing cloud, or by patches of shade thrown on it from its own inequalities of surface. Near the island a number of boatmen, whose ark, or "broad-horn," as it was called in the language of the country, lay fastened at the beach, had built a fire on the bank, which shed its red glare far over the scene, and gave a picturesque effect to the persons of the crew as they passed to and fro about the flames.

The precise spot to which the attention of the reader is invited was a small projecting headland on the Ohio side, round which the current swept with greater rapidity than elsewhere, denoting that the channel at that place ran close along the shore. The fresh, earthy color and beetling shape of the bank showed it to have been worn away by the attrition of the water. From its edge, the bodies of several large, fallen trees, whose roots had been left by the soil, projected to a considerable distance over the current. The ends of the broken branches protruded beyond the line of shadow, and were tipped by the moonbeams, which also gave the brightness of quicksilver to the ripples and eddies that played round the fragments which descended into the tide. A little rivulet, near this place, after having pursued its way in darkness through the bed of a gloomy ravine, came gushing and gurgling out from the forest, and, mingling its waters with the Ohio, contributed to swell the broad and sparkling volume that rolled through the silent scene. Nothing save the plash and purling of this little brook, as it fretted over the obstructions of its channel, broke the deep stillness which brooded over the Ohio shore. The leaves, charged with dew, hung almost motionless from the branches; or when slightly stirred, their low, rustling, whispering sound rather heightened than interrupted the repose of nature.

"All was so still, so soft, in earth and air,  
You scarce would start to meet a spirit there."

And a dim, shadowy form that stole out from the jaws of the ravine might almost have been taken for a spirit, so indistinct was the outline of its figure, which seemed rather like a mass of darkness deeper than the surrounding gloom, than the substantial form of a man. He moved slowly forward, and seemed bending under the weight of something which he carried on his back. On reaching the margin of the river, he threw this from him, and it fell with a dull, heavy sound to the sand. He then flitted across the beach into the mouth of the ravine, whence he directly after again emerged, bearing something which, from his slow and laborious tread, seemed not less weighty, though of smaller compass, than the former burden. Throwing it to the ground at the place where his first load had been deposited, he knelt down beside it, and in that posture continued several minutes. He then rose, and seemed to be dragging something along the sand which required the exertion of all his strength, till, stepping on the trunk of one of the fallen trees, the burden by a strong effort was drawn into the river, when, partly buoyed by the water, there appeared to be less difficulty in sustaining its weight, as it was hauled toward the end of the tree. On reaching that point, there was a sudden plunge, followed by a slight gurgling sound, and directly after a number of bubbles floated out into the moonlight, dancing on the ridges of the circling undulations which spread around the spot.

But the water refused to conceal the object which had been committed to its depths. It sunk for a moment, when, as if some ill-fastened weight had dropped from it, it rose again, and drifting out beyond the shadow of the bank, exposed, as the moonlight fell upon it, the livid features of a corpse. As this spectacle drew the attention of the person on the tree, he hurried to the extreme end of the trunk, in the hope, probably, of catching the body as it was borne past by the eddy. But the current had already whirled it far beyond his reach, and as it was thus carried along, rising and falling on the billows, its glazed eyes and clenched teeth visible in the moonlight, it would have required no great stretch of the imagination to fancy its features distorted by a grisly smile of vengeance.

The person on the tree seemed greatly perplexed by this event. He had partly stripped off his clothes as if with the intention of plunging into the stream and bearing the body back to the shore, when his purpose was interrupted by approaching sounds. He started, listened for a moment, then caught up his garments in haste, and walking as rapidly over the old and slippery trunk as the darkness would permit, sprang upon the beach, and glided into the edge of the wood. The outline of his figure had just mingled with the darkness of the forest, when the nature and cause of the noises became apparent.

The music of a violin, mingled with loud talk and laughter, was now borne distinctly on the air; and in a few minutes the long, slender form of a keel-boat glided round the neighboring point. Its crew were collected in a group on the forward part of the deck, some of them engaged in a rude encounter of wits, while others, reclining in a lazy, listless posture, idly listened to the notes which one of their number drew from a tuneless fiddle, or gave ear to the coarse sallies and repartees of their comrades. A short, thickset person at the opposite end of the boat, whose business seemed to be to guide her course, stood leaning with folded arms across the tiller, his hard and weather-beaten features twisted into an expression of chagrin, which very plainly showed he did not enter into the mirth of the others.

“When you goin’ to stop that cussed rumpus?” at length he called out, losing all patience at their boisterous mirth.

At this moment, the fiddler got his instrument in tune, and shot off on the “Arkansas Traveler,” two of the hands instantly springing up and slapping their feet down on the deck with a fury that seemed well calculated to burst the bottom out. Their heads bobbed up and down, and they bumped incessantly against each other in their enthusiasm. The heel of the fiddler went up and down like a hydraulic ram, while his mouth was so far distended as to render visible the huge tobacco quid which filled up one entire side.

“Ladies cross—up the middle!” he called out, as if direct-

ing the different sets. "*Sashea*" (with a strong accent on the last syllable). "Keep time—ladies *sashea*."

"When you goin' to stop that cussed rumpus?" again called out the man at the opposite end of the boat, who was no other than Hugh Overton.

"Oh! keep your old clam-shell shut," called back one of the dancers. "You've been as cross as a crosscut-saw ever since we started. I say, boys, why is Hugh Overton yender, leanin' on that guidin' oar, like one of them ancient kings what lost his son at sea when he was tryin' to save his daater?"

"Give it up, Sam. What is it?" called out several.

"'Cause he never smiled agin," replied the dancer, amid a roar of laughter. But the face of Hugh Overton remained immobile as a statue. He continued looking moodily down stream, and it was manifest he was in excessive ill-humor about something.

"Any objections, Hugh, to our havin' a shin-dig?" called out another, in a very meek tone.

"Yes, I have," he returned, sulkily.

"'Bject away then, and who cares," retorted the other, springing up and joining in the dance. Every thing was going along as merry as a marriage, when their attention was attracted by one of the foremost hands calling out:

"Hallo, Tom! I wonder what yan thing is, that's bobbing up and down in the west chute, like a Mississippi sawyer. It has a mighty dubious look."

Several of the crew turned themselves lazily round, and cast their eyes in the direction pointed out. The boat in the meanwhile, was moving in a part of the river where the current was swiftest, and rapidly approached the object.

"May I never kill a wild-cat!" replied the one who had been addressed, "if it ain't powerful like a man's head. There, by ——!" exclaimed he, as an eddy turned the face of the corpse partly round for a moment, "I sighted it then, and I'd bet the best keel on the river 'ginst a beggarly dug-out, it's some poor devil that's been drowned."

The attention of the man at the helm being drawn by these exclamations to the floating object, he guided the boat toward

it, directing the hands at the same time to get out their poles. They jumped with alacrity to their feet, and dropping their long, iron-pointed setting-poles over the side, placed the ends to their shoulders, and walked along, one after another, to the after part of the vessel, in a half-bent posture, pushing the boat forward in the painful manner practised upon the western rivers before the introduction of steam navigation.

"Now, then, for a reverend set, and head her off!" cried a stout, broad-shouldered, half-naked boatman, who seemed to be a leading spirit among the crew.

"I wonder what's got into Bill Sawyer to shy off so," grumbled another in an undertone, showing that what he said was not meant for the ears of the helmsman. "Hugh Overton knows no more about a steering oar than a steering oar knows about him. See, he yaws her about like a Yankee moving-boat in a hurricane. I'd give a smart chance myself if Ned Overton had been going the trip instead of him."

"Mark my words, Jim," said the first speaker, as the hands returned in Indian file, trailing their poles toward the bow of the boat, "you'll see Ned Overton aboard this craft afore the night's over."

"What makes you reckon so?"

"Reckon! I don't reckon at all—I'm as good as sartain. I've kept my eye on him and Hugh, and I know there's some wild piece of devilment going on atwixt them. But that's none of my concern. Just you memorize what I say—he'll be aboard this night."

"I wish he may," answered the other, "either him or Bill Sawyer, or some patron that's up to bushwacking; or else it won't be long after we're in the wicked Massissip afore we find ourselves spitted on a snag, or tossed on the top of a wreck-heap."

"Well, there's this to say for Hugh, any how," observed another of the crew, "he did wait for Sawyer as long as any white man could expect in reason; for you know he was monstrous fidgety to set off by sundown."

The keel-boat, during this short dialogue, had drawn so near to the object in the water, that it was now plainly perceived

to be a corpse, and the interest which this circumstance occasioned put a temporary pause to conversation. The body, on being lifted aboard, was at once recognized as that of Edward Overton, and the gouts of blood upon his dress, and the wound from which they had flowed, made it evident he had come to his death by violence.

The course of the boat was now turned toward Adrianopolis, which lay on the right bank, a little further down the river. In a few minutes the long and heavily modeled vessel glided in under the bluff on which the town was situated. On being made fast, its inmates proceeded to climb the bank, two of them bearing the corpse upon their shoulders.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

“ Let us meet  
And question this most bloody piece of work  
To know it further.”—MACBETH.

THE village of Adrianopolis, like many towns of the West, had been laid out on a scale of grandeur which must often have elicited a smile from those who passed through it during the first years of its existence. One who looked at a map of its plan, and saw noted there, in large capitals, Public Square, City Hall, College Place, Avenue I., Avenue II., etc., must have found some difficulty in persuading himself that this was really intended as an outline of the little scattered hamlet we are now to describe. But as he who gains a battle, though by means which ought to have insured defeat, is a great general, so not a few of the visionary schemers and extravagant speculators who sought to be founders of great cities in the West, have earned a reputation for wisdom and foresight by those very projects which, when they were framed, excited the derision of all sensible men. This remark applies to

Adrianopolis. All the gigantic views of its founder, to be sure, are even yet not realized ; but the disparity between the plan and the reality is so much diminished, as at least to deprive one of all just ground of ridicule.

At the date of our story, however, Adrianopolis was in its infancy. The town consisted of a few houses, most of them log-cabins of the humblest description, which straggled at long and irregular intervals on either side of a wide road, called *Main* street, by way of distinction, though there was no other. Among these lowly edifices, there were some of a more ambitious appearance. One of them, a stately but unfinished brick house, displayed upon its front the word **BANK**, denoting that it was one of those manufactories of a paper substitute for money, which became so numerous in the western country a few years after, and from the evil effects of whose over-issues some portions of that country were long in recovering. In another place there was a row of some five or six houses, likewise of brick, none of which seemed finished, and a part uninhabited, while others were hastening to decay from being occupied by persons of a description greatly inferior to that of the buildings. There was an uncomfortable air of newness about every thing. The smoke of brick-kilns mingled with that of the houses they were preparing materials to complete. Heaps of chips, shavings and rubbish, before every door, showed that the edifice had just started into being. The stumps of the forest-trees were still standing in the road, some freshly cut, and others blackened by fire ; and "the merry green wood" yet waved its embowering branches over the place designated in the map as the Public Square.

So important an incident as that of the body of a murdered man being picked up in the river and brought to the village, naturally created a great sensation among the little community of Adrianopolis. The night was not yet far advanced ; though many of the simple inhabitants, having neither "soirées" to attend, nor "the last new novel" to read, were already snug in their beds. The news, however, spread rapidly from one to another, and in an incredibly short time there was perhaps not a man, woman, or child in the town who had

not heard the story, and aided in swelling the number of conjectures which the circumstance gave rise to.

The bar-room of the tavern, to which the body had been conveyed, presented a singular group, drawn together by a common impulse of curiosity. For some moments no voice broke the silence, every mind being impressed with those vague yet powerful sensations of awe which the sight of death—especially sudden and violent death—never fails to occasion. As they gazed on the pale, cold, distorted face of Overton, whom most of the assemblage had seen within a few days in the pride of health and strength, the suddenness of the catastrophe by which he had been cut off created a general feeling of commiseration among the spectators. In some minds this feeling almost assumed the higher character of respect for the individual—a sentiment never entertained for him during life. Strange and variable is the mind of man! The most of those who now looked on the body of the lawless hunter had probably anticipated some such termination to his career, and had thought, perhaps, that they should scarcely be sorry if their anticipations were realized. But the event produced different feelings. Murmurs of regret for his fate soon swelled into denunciations against his murderer. They who at first only ventured half-whispered surmises, gathering confidence from each other, soon grew loud in their tone, and bandied conjectures back and forth, with a freedom of speech which, however much it might show regard for the dead, at least evinced but little respect for the characters of certain living. Their allusions and innuendoes were so broad that it was easy to see which way the current of suspicion was setting.

“Oh, no doubt of it,” said a lazy, fat-cheeked, beetle-browed man, in reply to something which a small, thin, sharp-nosed person, in a faded suit of black, had raised himself upon tiptoe to whisper in his ear—“no doubt of it at all, Mr. Ferule. Dodge, the peddler, met him in full chase, and hard on the heels of poor Ned; and that was only a few hours ago, just in the edge of the evening. No doubt of it in my mind.”

“I didn’t meet Overton—that is to say, I don’t know that I met him,” replied the peddler, who had mingled with the



crowd, and could now have almost bitten his tongue in two for having mentioned any thing about the pursuit he had witnessed.

"Ah, it won't do now, Nathan," said the burly man, with a coarse sneer; "you are brother Yankees, you know, and must stand by each other. For my part, I prefer believing your first story."

"He has been absent from town all day, I believe," said the little man in black, in a soft, insinuating voice.

"He had his pistols repaired last Saturday," said the village smith.

"He has received some suspicious-looking letters," said the landlord and postmaster.

"He bought a jack-knife of me no longer ago than yesterday," said the shopkeeper.

In this way the crowd went on, almost every one seeming fixed in his suspicions, and willing to add weight to the circumstances which appeared against our hero. We would not have it inferred from this, that Charles Dudley had created no friends during his residence in Adrianopolis. On the contrary his kind, conciliatory manners and disposition had made him rather a general favorite. But it is our duty to record events as they occurred; leaving it to each reader to reconcile them with his own particular notions of human nature. Probably the very persons who now, in their random bar-room talk, and in the first moments of excitement, seemed willing to confirm the course suspicion was taking, would, were Dudley condemned, or even apprehended, have exerted themselves in his behalf, and if acquitted, would have cordially rejoiced.

There were not wanting some in the assemblage who opposed the suspicions which involved the character of our hero. Among these, the peddler was not the least active. But he himself, by reporting what he had seen, with some of those little embellishments which travelers and story-tellers feel privileged to use, had furnished the strongest ground of imputation. Finding himself encountered by his own story, which ever way he turned, he at last desisted from argument,

dropped sullenly into a corner, and turning a deaf ear to the babble and clamor around him, busied his mind in an endeavor to frame some plan of rendering a service to Dudley, equal to the injury he had been the unwitting means of doing him.

Persons at length came into the bar-room to remove the body to another part of the house, in order to prepare it for burial. In handling it, a leather strap, which had been dangling from the feet of the corpse, was accidentally loosened, and fell, unobserved by all except the quick eye of Dodge, upon the floor. He rose from his seat and walked across the room, contriving, as he passed, slyly to kick it underneath the table on which the body had been lying. The company began to disperse soon after the removal of the object which had drawn them together, and dropping off one by one, Nathan Dodge was, in a few minutes, the only person left in the bar-room. Picking up the strap and thrusting it in his pocket, he also left the tavern and repaired to his lodgings, a certain pleased feeling giving great elasticity to his step, as he reflected that he had succeeded in withdrawing one important article of evidence, which might have been used to fix the imputed crime upon Dudley.

During the open and somewhat noisy discussion that had been carried on in the bar-room, the same event had furnished the topic of low and earnest discourse to a smaller number of persons assembled in another apartment. Among these were Hugh Overton the brother of the deceased, a young, red-headed man, a lawyer who had recently established himself in the village, and two or three others. Various plans for procuring such evidence as might lead to a conviction of the person who had deprived the hunter of life were proposed; and among the measures determined on, it was agreed that a party should set out early in the morning to examine the margin of the river, near the place where the body had been found, with a view to discover the "trail" of the murderer.

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Charles Dudley rose early on the following morning, and in a frame of mind somewhat resembling the changed aspect of the weather. The wind had shifted to the north-east during

the night, and dense, damp clouds now rolled through the air with a sluggish motion, their drooping folds showing they were heavily charged with rain. The colored leaves were freshly and profusely scattered beneath every tree; and those which still clad the branches twirled and fluttered on their stems with a sound that deepened the melancholy sobbing of the wind. Flocks of wild birds on their way to the south, flew nearer to the earth than they were wont; and in the inclosure of Enoch Sedley the domestic geese, those living and sure barometers, ran screaming and flapping their wings along the ground.

The family met round the breakfast-table at about the usual hour. The face of Sedley was haggard, his eyes blood-hot, and his whole appearance denoting that his rest had not been refreshing. The deeper emotions of Lucy's bosom had subsided into a feeling of tranquil dejection, and her sweet face lost little of its loveliness from the subdued expression of melancholy which it now wore. Dudley seized the first opportunity of renewing his suit to the maiden for their immediate union; and the application was now seconded by Sedley, who expressed himself anxious to see the rite performed which would give his Lucy a friend and protector when her old uncle might be removed. "We know not, my dear child," he said, "how soon that may happen, and it is but prudent to be prepared for the worst." Lucy's blue eyes swam in tears at the thoughts called up by this remark; but she could no longer refuse to comply, and extending her hand to Dudley, she whispered:

"You know why I have hesitated, Charles; you know my fears—you know all. If you are yet desirous of uniting your fate with mine, here is my hand—and let the marriage take place when you will."

We need not pause to say that Charles seized the offered hand with ardor, nor mention what fervent kisses he printed on it as he pressed it between his own glowing palms. In a few minutes, Cato, mounted on Dudley's horse, was seen dashing down the path toward Adrianopolis, and hardly an hour had elapsed before he again entered the apartment,

his black, shining face dilated with a happy and intelligent grin, as he leered round on the awkward form of the missionary, whom he ushered in.

The brief and simple marriage-ceremony, as performed by the Presbyterian clergy, was completed, and the missionary (who, though a slow-minded man, was well-educated and zealous), had been for some minutes engaged in fervent prayer, when a near trampling of horses interrupted the silence of devotion. In a moment after, five or six persons, headed by Hugh Overton, broke rudely into the room. A visible shudder passed over the frame of the old man when the noise was first heard; and as the party entered, he buried his face deeper in his hands, and his heart beat so violently that it might almost have been heard knocking against his sides.

“You are our prisoner!” exclaimed two or three voices in the same breath.

The old man started to his feet—but it was Dudley that the officers had seized. The room now presented a scene of the utmost confusion. Lucy, with a strong effort of self-control, had stifled the shriek that was rising to her lips; but sunk terrified upon a chair, her bosom throbbing and panting with tumultuous and complicated emotions. Her uncle looked the very picture of wretchedness. His knees trembled, and his face was alternately flushed and pale, as his eye shifted with a quick, tremulous, amazed glance from the officers to the prisoner. The countenance of poor Cato faded to a hue which, had it been his standing color, might have rendered his paternity a matter of some doubt; and the missionary, still mechanically repeating broken phrases of his prayer, looked on with eyes and mouth wide open, utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of the scene.

Dudley, though taken by surprise, was the first to recover self-possession. On being informed of the nature of the accusation, he whispered something to Lucy, which was intended to reassure her, and turning to Sedley—who seemed to shrink within himself as the eye of Dudley rested upon him—said in a low and emphatic tone, that all would yet go well. The party immediately

## THE BLOCK HOUSE.

### CHAPTER XI.

#### THE TRIAL.

**"I am a wretch, most wretched in myself,  
And still more wretched in the pain I give.  
Oh, curse that villain, that detested villain !  
He has spread misery o'er my fated life ;  
He will undo us all."**—JOANNA BAILLIE.

THE administration of justice, in the community of Adrianopolis at the time of our narrative, was far different from what it is at this day. It may well be a disputed question, whether the modern enginery of law is more effective and evenhanded than was the more ancient method. Justice and humanity were more often the actuating and controlling powers in the days of our forefathers than in the days of their wiser but not better sons ; and, although they may have sometimes erred in their judgment and decisions, the error generally was on the side of mercy.

It happened that the court sat in Adrianopolis a few days after Dudley was arrested on the charge of murder, so that his trial came on almost immediately, while the horrible tragedy was fresh in the minds of the villagers. The prosecuting attorney on the part of the Government was a short, fierce-looking man, about thirty years of age, bald on the top of his head, with his sleek hair brushed so vigorously upward that each particular hair pointed in precisely the same direction as did his huge standing-collar. He had fitting, restless eyes, that ever seemed looking for something they could never find. To the villagers, he was a man of profound attainments, extraordinary penetration, and "prodigious erudition." The manner in which he talked of the most famous men as his "colleagues" was convincing in itself ; and to hear him laugh about some joke related to him by his "old friend Joe" (referring to Joe Daviess, who, just then, was becoming celebrated), or "Tom Jefferson," or "Jim Madison," would have filled any person with awe and reverence for him. Like Mr. Perkins

He was much given to the use of high-sounding words, more effective from their stunning incomprehensibility, than their particular applicability. When a case was in progress, he would have been seen seated before the Judge or Justice at his table, with a profound, solemn look, busily writing, and completely barricaded behind a huge pile of books. Had any suspicious eye been disposed to watch him, it would have noticed that the lawyer, when writing, rarely dotted an *i* or crossed a *t*, and that at regular intervals he jammed his pen toward his inkstand, half the time without entering it, all of which might have led one to doubt whether he was transcribing any thing at all or not. Then, as something caught his ear, he would pause abruptly, look up, clutch one of the books before him, and, looking at the page bottom side up, would turn half the leaf down, and pound it shut as though he had nailed an invaluable point, and, contracting his eyebrows, level his restless orbs for a few moments upon the opposing counsel, as if he would annihilate him. We further suspect that had those awe-inspiring books which loaded his table been examined, not more than half would have been found relating to law or jurisprudence. He rejoiced in the name of Scroggs.

The day of the trial was clear, and so absorbed was the entire village of Adrianopolis with the murder case, that nearly all work was abandoned. Mr. Perkins dismissed school in order to attend the trial, it being generally suspected that he was studying law on the sly, and wished to take notes of this extraordinary case. Of course not one-half or one-quarter of the villagers could be accommodated in the building set apart for the trial. The instant the door was opened, the crowd swarmed in and packed the room so densely that the Justice, or "Judge," as he was more generally termed, being a pursy man, obtained his seat only by the united efforts of several stout men, who shoved him forward by main force.

In the sacred square in the centre of the room was seated Mr. Scroggs, busily writing with a pen that had no ink in it, while on the opposite side sat Mr. Perkins, the picture of

unutterable knowledge and attention. In the chair behind the desk were visible the head and shoulders of the Judge, who was continually mopping his massive forehead with a huge red and brown silk pocket-handkerchief, and puffing like a porpoise, from the severe exertion he had put forth to gain his seat.

It being understood that Dudley intended to conduct his own case, he was brought into the room in order to challenge the jurors as they were selected. The only perceptible change in his appearance was that he looked paler than usual. His demeanour was calm and collected, and there was that expression in his face which showed that he was fully prepared for what might come, and was not to be thrown off his balance by any proceedings, however unexpected they might be.

As he entered, all eyes were turned toward him, and a low murmur ran through the crowd.

"Don't appear to be scart a bit," said the blacksmith; stands it just as though it wan't nothin' at all."

"He's seen sich bizness afore," remarked the bashful tailor, blowing his nose, so as to escape the battery of eyes that was leveled against him.

"He's young but '*orful*,'" remarked another.

"Don't believe it's the fust man he's murdered," said the shoemaker, who seemed to have a special spite against the young man.

Nathan Dodge, the peddler, was standing next to the last speaker, and overheard this shameful remark. He looked threateningly at him; and the son of St. Crispin, to show his contempt for the Yankee, repeated his insulting remarks. The words had hardly left his mouth, when the bony knuckles of the peddler struck his face and eyes with such stunning force, that in a few seconds the shoemaker saw more stars than Herschel ever discovered. Upon regaining his senses, instead of making an outcry, or showing fight, he jammed his hands down in his pockets, looked sideways at the peddler, and went to humming "Old Hundred." From that moment he entertained the most unbounded respect for the tin peddler.

The work of empanneling a jury was difficult and tedious. Nathan Dodge elbowed his way to the prisoner, who, when a name was called, waited for his assent before allowing him to be chosen. Among the first names were those of the shoemaker and tailor. It would be difficult to describe their chagrin at being set aside. After several hours, however, the jurymen were selected and sworn. Everything was conducted in the usual manner. The first witness placed on the stand was Nathan Dodge. Looking supernaturally solemn and impressive, Mr. Scroggs said:

"Mr. Dodge, you have just sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Let me abjure you, therefore, in the name of this great Commonwealth, not to forget the requirements of the momentous oath you have taken. Let no prejudice for or against the prisoner, according to the circumstances detailed, lead you to say what ain't so. I have now to request that you will tell, in a brief, concise, pointed manner, without making a long story of it, all you know about this matter."

"Waal, then," commenced the loquacious peddler, squirting a mouthful of tobacco-juice in the coat-pocket of the shoemaker, who was standing near him, "to cut the matter short, I was returning to the village on the evening in question, when I meets Ned Overton, a-horseback, riding toward the bluffs—"

"Not too fast; wait till I transcribe the interrogatory and its reply," interrupted Scroggs, really doing what he proposed.

"Proceed," he added, a moment later.

"When, as I said, I meets Ned Overton. Me and Ned being on not very good terms, from a little muss we had the other day in the woods, we didn't speak. You see the way the muss come about was this. Ned Overton fired at a deer and missed it—"

"Never mind about that. Confine yourself to the circumstances under deliberation, *if you please.*"

"Me and Ned, then, not being on good terms, we didn't stop to talk. The fact of it is, he turned into the woods to



keep clear of me; but he come back into the road agin so soon, that I had a good sight of him. It was a bright moon-light night, and I *seen him*."

"You could swear, then, that it was Edward Overton, the hunter, and no one else?"

"I'd stake my life on it," said the peddler.

"As you are positive in regard to that fact," said Mr. Scroggs, shutting his eyes a moment, as if to deliberate upon it, "please proceed."

"He was going at an all-fired gallop, but the man coming behind him was going at an all-fireder one."

"Who was this man?"

"The one that was follering?"

"The same."

Dodge looked as if he disliked intensely to answer the question, but seeing that no good could come from hesitating, replied:

"The prisoner at the bar, Charles Dudley."

At this juncture the shoemaker was noticed to rub his eyes vigorously and weep profusely. Much speculation was caused by this unexpected occurrence; but, on inquiry, it turned out that he had just been blowing his nose on the handkerchief which had received the tobacco-juice Nathan Dodge had ejected into his pocket, a portion of which getting in his eyes, made the weeping entirely involuntary upon his part.

"Have you any thing more to say, Mr. Dodge?" asked Mr. Scroggs, waiting, with pen in hand, to take down his reply.

"Yes! I've a good 'eal."

"Please let us hear it, then."

"In the first place, I'm certain Charles Dudley didn't kill Ned Overton."

"How do you know he didn't?"

"How do I know he didn't?" repeated the peddler, "fetched up," for a moment, by this pointed question. "Why, I *know* he didn't."

"We'll spare you the trouble of your repeated animad-

versions and derogations. You may retire if you have nothing further to say."

"I *have* something further to say," repeated the peddler, doggedly. "In the next place, if Charles Dudley did kill Ned Overton, he done right, for he was running off with his gal, and I should like to know—"

"That will do, I tell you," said Scroggs, looking as threatening as a thunder-cloud.

"Which of you wouldn't do the same thing to get his gal? I tell you what—" went on Nathan Dodge, talking faster and faster.

"I appeal to your Honor to stop that madman," said Mr. Scroggs, blindly furious, turning toward the Judge.

The latter laid his head back, shut his eyes, and, turning black in the face with the effort, shouted :

"*Stop!*"

"I tell you what, *I'd* do the same thing ; and if—"

"*STOP!*"

"I'll stop when I get through, and not afore," said Dodge, getting furious himself. "Blastation ! you didn't say nothing as long as I talked on your side ; and now I want to say something on the right side."

"By thunder !" exclaimed the Judge, bounding to his feet, and picking up a good-sized square box, filled with saw-dust and chews of tobacco, which for many a term had answered the office of spittoon to him—"by thunder ! if you don't shut up your jaws, I'll break this over your head."

"Do it if you dare, and I'll punch your eyes out when I get you outside," replied the peddler, spitting in his palms and doubling them up.

The Judge, in his blind fury, held the spittoon tremulously, and the contents commenced dropping out. The first intimation Mr. Scroggs (who was seated directly beneath the upraised weapon) had, was the pattering of several "quids" of tobacco directly upon his bald pate, and the sprinkling of the saw-dust over the "brief" before him.

"I say, Judge, your Honor, hold on ! Don't you see what

you're doing?" he shouted, floundering his legs under the table in his efforts to regain his feet.

The Judge gave his spittoon a flirt, with the intention of replacing it again; but, alas, his excited nerves shook the entire contents down in a shower over the head and shoulders of Mr. Scroggs.

The attorney sprung to his feet, and, for a moment, seemed beside himself. The sight of what had been done only increased the Judge's fury, and he was fully determined to hurl the spittoon at the head of the contumacious witness. The shoemaker, having learned the character of the peddler, had wound his way to the opposite side of the room, so as to be out of reach in case Nathan should make any demonstration. He now watched with the most intense delight the madness of the presiding officer, and anticipated that Dodge would be paid for striking him in the face.

"Throw it, Judge! throw it, Judge!" he shouted, jumping up and down with joy. "L'arn him how to behave himself. Throw it, Judge!"

The Judge *did* throw it; but, being furious, and, withal, having had little practice, he was a very poor "shot;" and the spittoon, instead of going directly at the head of the peddler, as he certainly expected it would, went right straight across the room, and struck the shoemaker square in the face. Seeing how utterly he had failed, the Judge clawed frantically around him for something else to throw, but his hand, after passing over his pens and papers, rested only on the head of a young urchin, who had wedged himself in by the desk. Thinking he had lit upon a suitable object, he jerked the affrighted lad nearly off his feet. The boy yelled furiously, and the Judge settled back in his chair in impotent rage.

The ridiculous turn which affairs had thus taken had the effect of restoring Nathan Dodge to good-humor, who now yielded to the solicitations of Dudley, and retired from the stand. Matters were righted, ruffled tempers settled down nearly to their former level, and the trial proceeded. It being ascertained that the peddler had not yet communicated the most important part of the testimony, he was recalled. He

was sullen and reticent at first ; but Scroggs succeeded, after a time, in forcing from him the admission that the statement which he had made about the pursuer being Dudley, was not a mere supposition, for he had checked his horse and inquired in regard to Overton ; and, upon learning the direction he had taken, had immediately dashed after him in full pursuit. As Dudley fully admitted this, the testimony was conclusive.

If any thing further was needed to fasten conviction upon the prisoner, it was soon forthcoming. The party that we have mentioned as setting out from the village on the discovery of the murder, to ascertain whether any thing further could be learned regarding it, had met with a success beyond their hope. In the edge of the wood, near the place where the body had been discovered, they struck upon the prints of a horse's foot, following which through the windings of a ravine, they had found a horseshoe, still bright, and showing other marks of having been recently cast. Continuing on the trail, they at length reached the ridge-road, at a spot where the ground was stained with blood, and was marked with prints, apparently stamped into it by the feet of men in strife. As if to complete the chain of circumstantial evidence, they found, as they were returning by the road toward Adrianopolis, the hat of Dudley. It lay among the bushes and high grass, a little way down the edge of the bluff, and at some distance from the scene of strife ; but not further than it might have been blown by the southerly wind, which had prevailed all the first part of the night. The feet of Dudley's horse had been examined, when left by Cato for a moment at the door of the missionary's lodgings. It was discovered that he had lost one of his shoes. The shoe itself was positively identified by the blacksmith ; and the hat was sworn to by a number of witnesses.

The evidence against Dudley was stronger and more connected than he himself could have anticipated. Some parts of it he listened to with surprise. Throughout the trial, however, he preserved great composure, never for a moment losing his self-possession. He did not deny any of the allegations, or seek to rebut any of the testimony. This course

of conduct gained him no great credit with the jury or villagers.

Dudley had no witnesses to call on his side, signifying that he was satisfied to let the question rest with the jury without any attempt at defence upon his part. He understood well enough that nothing he could say would change the tide of feeling which had set in against him. He had placed some hope upon the fact that the jury, if satisfied of his guilt, would deem that his provocation justified the deed ; but when he recalled the disfavor and suspicion with which he was looked upon by the villagers, he saw that there was little or no ground for this hope. He resolved to die with the crime fastened upon him, rather than allow the hoary-headed Mr. Sedley to suffer for what he alone must have done.

Mr. Scroggs occupied fully a minute in rising from his seat to make his speech on the part of the prosecutor. The solemn, awe-inspiring look that darkened his countenance baffles all attempt at description. The glistening pate, the bushy eyebrows, the restless eyes—now fixed as twin stars—the snub-nose, with the nob illuminated, the bristling hair, in which could be discerned a few traces of saw-dust, the huge standing-collar—all these were eloquent with learning and dignity. Placing his left hand behind him, under the skirt of his coat, with the palm outward, and holding in his right hand his brief upside down, he leaned across the table, and glancing a moment at the twelve men, who seemed petrified by the load of responsibility resting upon them, said :

“GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY: The case upon which you are called to act to-day, is one of the most solemn that ever convulsed the annals of our great and glorious country. The case, gentlemen, is murder ; yes, murder—murder of the darkest and most fiendish kind. As I have sat here a-listening to the o'erwhelming evidence that has come in like the resistless tide of the ever-sounding ocean, I have been nearly overcome. Used as I am to attending on the most extronny criminal cases that has ever come before the courts of this continent—used as I am to witnessing the most revolting cases of anarchy and crime on record—used as I am, I say, to all

this, never, gentlemen, never in all my extensive practice, have I sot on a case that has harrered up my nature like this one. No, gentlemen, never. [Here Mr. Scroggs crooked his forefinger and gouged his right eye, as if some of the saw-dust had worked its way into it.]

"When we consider the character of the unfortunate deceased, his many virtues, and few, if any vices—when we consider these, I say, the horrible magnitude of this crime makes its enormity unparalleled in the records of our nation. He who has fallen by the assassinator's knife, gentlemen, is Mr. Edward Overton, a gentleman well known to you all [a voice, supposed to be Nathan Dodge's, "Known a little too well.]" And all who have thus known him can testify to his many virtues, too numerous to mention. Mr. Edward Overton gentlemen, was a man such as is rarely met with now-a-days. ["Thank the Lord for that!" The voice resembled that of the tin peddler.] A man without a family, he never forgot the widow and the fatherless; their wants would ever be uppermost in his noble thoughts.

"Though unconnected with any church, I understand he was a regular communicant, dispensing his charities with as liberal hand as does the dew of the morning. Rising with the lark, his time, until the setting of the sun, was occupied in endeavoring to ascertain by what means he could benefit his fellow creatures. Further than this, gentlemen, he was in the habit of making extensive journeys through the trackless forests. And you, gentlemen, will be surprised when I tell you what I have just learned was the object of these extensive journeys through the trackless forest. The reason why these extensive journeys through the trackless forest was made, was in order to accumulate, gentlemen, enough means to found a church which should stand as an everlasting monument after his death!"

Mr. Scroggs here paused, and took a chew of tobacco, in order to notice the effect of this wonderful fiction. Great as was the respect the villagers entertained for their attorney, he was "going it too strong" for them. Had Mr. Edward Overton heard his own eulogy, he must have protested. But

Mr. Scroggs was working on the *feelings* of the jury; working on the feelings of the jury, Mr. Scroggs considered his particular *forte*.

“Yes, gentlemen, to found a church, which through all coming ages should stand as a living monument of the love, benevolence, unbounded generosity, unparalleled piety, extronery perseverance, and indomitable determination of its founder, Mr. Edward Overton. This was his object in making his extensive journeys through the trackless forest, at the most inclement season of the year. Having done this 'ere kind of toil for a good many years, he had amassed quite a considerable sum, and I have good reason to believe he designed commencing the construction of this stupendous edifice this very day—this very day, gentlemen, on which instead he *lays* a cold, cold corpse down in the unfathomable mysteries of that dread retreat which we call the grave.

“When you contemplate this crime, your feelings, gentlemen, must be harrered up the same as my feelings is harrered up. I will not attempt to enumerate the many virtues of this noble-hearted hunter. 'Twere a vain task. I will not ask you, gentlemen, to consider the numerous acts of kindness which he was always perpetrating with a high and open hand, nor his undeviating, eternal, immutable and unchangeable benevolence, generosity and piety, nor the trials and sufferings which he underwent and endured in making his extensive journeys through the trackless forest at the most inclement season of the year; nor the self-sacrificing devotion with which he toiled in order to accomplish the dream of his life—that of building a church edifice which, through all coming ages, should stand as a living monument of the love, benevolence, unbounded generosity, unparalleled piety, extronery perseverance, and indomitable determination of the founder, Mr. Edward Overton. I will not ask you, I say, to consider these, gentlemen. 'Twere a vain task. 'Twould be an insult to suppose that such intelligent, educated, and accomplished citizens as yourself had failed to take in all the points of the evidence which have been given in this morning.

“I shrink aghast horror-struck from the contemplation of the inhuman murderer, who in the dead of night, with up-

lifted arm, and iridescent dagger, stole up to his victim and let out his life-current upon the ensanguined turf. I do not ask 'Who is he? where did he come from? how many crimes like these has he committed? *why* did he come here?' I don't ask you, gentlemen, 'Why did he come here?' Peradventure he can answer that question himself better than any of these constituents which surround him. I do not refer, gentlemen to the suspicious circumstances—and I use a mild term, gentlemen, when I say *suspicious circumstances*—I do not refer, gentlemen, to the suspicious circumstances which has brought this 'ere prisoner here. 'Twere a vain task. I only ask you to consider the merits of the case. Think only for a moment of the character of this characterless adventurer who makes his appearance here, unheralded and unknown, and the noble-hearted fallen hunter, whose sole object that he lived for was that he might erect a church edifice that through all coming ages should be a living monument, etc., and who, to accomplish this Herculean and saintly and good task, was accustomed to make extensive journeys through the trackless forest at the most inclement seasons of the year. I do not ask you, I say, to consider these, gentlemen. 'Twere a vain task. But, doubtless, beyond a peradventure, you *have* considered them; and, without any further circumlocution, or debate, or animadversion, I submit the case, knowing, gentlemen, knowing, gentlemen, I say, that your magnanimous consciences will not allow you to deviate from the great and glorious path of rectitude."

Mr. Scroggs sat down in a halo of glory, slightly diluted with saw-dust, while the jury and audience looked upon him with as much reverence as they would upon George Washington, had he at that moment appeared among them. Dudley attempting no reply, the Judge arose to charge the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said he, "after the learned, eloquent, and forcible speech of Mr. Scroggs, the counsel for the prosecution, it is hardly necessary for me to say any thing. If you think the prisoner ain't guilty of the crime laid against him—which I know you can't think—why, all you got to do is to say so, and let him go about like a raging lion, seeking



whom he may devour. But if you think him guilty—which I know you must—say so, and I'll sentence him on the spot. That's all."

The jury whispered together a moment, and then the foreman arose.

"Have you agreed upon a verdict?" asked the Judge.

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty of the charge laid against him?"

"GUILTY."

"Sounds right. Stand up, Charles Dudley, and receive your sentence. You have been found guilty, and I sentence you to be hung by the neck until you're dead, three weeks from to-day. In the mean time, you will be removed to prison."

The verdict and sentence had been so rapid, and, withal, there had been such an air of absurdity about the trial, that Charles Dudley never for a moment realized that he was under sentence of death. When the sentence was pronounced, he felt a smile creeping over his face, which was not repressed as Nathan Dodge, at that moment, caught his glance, and gave a knowing wink and nod, as if to signify that the affair was by no means settled.

Among the audience there was another witness, who, although little noticed, took a deep interest in the proceedings. This was Cato, the black boy, belonging to Mr. Sedley. To him the proceedings wore an air of terrible reality. During the speech of the prosecuting attorney, and the charge of the Judge to the jury, his eyes seemed fairly starting from his head. And when the dreadful sentence of death was pronounced, he came near falling to the earth, so excessive was his agitation. Elbowing his way to the tin peddler he asked, in a husky whisper:

"Massa Dodge, is dey gwine to hang him?"

"Hang who?"

"Massa Dudley."

"That's what they say."

"How soon?"

"Three weeks from to-day, *they say*," replied the peddler, with a meaning emphasis upon the last two words.

"Free weeks," replied the negro, as if communing with himself. "Free weeks; dat am a considerable time."

"Not so darned long, either. What did you ax for, Snow-ball?"

"Nuffin, nuffin," replied Cato, as though he disliked to be questioned upon it.

"You needn't mind telling Miss Lucy that they're gwine to hang him," added Dodge. "Do you understand?"

"Why not?"

"They hain't hung him, you know, and you needn't scare her. Remember."

"I will"

"See then—hello! beg pardon, Shoe-pegs."

As he spoke, the peddler ejected a mouthful of tobacco-juice square in the face of the shoemaker, who was striving to catch the tenor of his words. The man humbly wiped his face, deeming it best to say nothing, and was not caught eavesdropping again.

The town of Adrianopolis nominally contained a jail and a penitentiary; but he who sought for these edifices through the village, would have found their existence, like that of many other things projected by its far-forward-looking founder, *in futuro*—a fiction. In the meanwhile, the block house, about a mile and a half from the town, answered the purpose of both, though but seldom required to be used in either capacity. Indeed, its doors had hardly been opened since three years before, when an incursion of the Indians being apprehended, a quantity of powder and other military stores had been deposited in its vault, with a view to being prepared for the worst. To this building Charles Dudley was committed.

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## CHAPTER XII.

## THE BLOCK HOUSE.

"Skins may differ, but affection  
Dwells in white and black the same."—COWPER.

THE storm which threatened in the morning did not come down till near nightfall. Dark, watery clouds, driven westward in thick and rolling masses, obscured the heaven during the whole day ; and the surface of the Ohio, disturbed and darkened by the fresh-blowing breeze, presented to the eye of Lucy, as she gazed on it from her window, an appearance as different from that of the preceding morning as her own prospects, so sadly changed in the mean while. The day rolled heavily on, in perfect unison with the feelings of those whom our story principally concerns. Perhaps the very correspondence of the weather with their situation rendered them less keenly alive to the evils which had befallen them. Few things are more painful to a mind ill at ease than a bright smile on the face of nature ; and the notes of joy have a strange, discordant sound to the ear of one whose heart is plunged in sorrow. Had the bright heaven, as on the preceding morning, been reflected in the shining river, and lighted into greater brilliancy the rainbow beauties of the decaying foliage—had the birds twittered among the trees, and the bees hummed in the sunny air, the gloom of Sedley and the dejection of his niece could not but have been heightened by painful contrast with surrounding objects. The cause of the old man's trouble, perhaps, lay too deep to be affected by atmospheric changes ; though the great master of the human heart has made one in somewhat similar, but far guiltier circumstances, cry out :

"Methinks there now should be one huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon !"

And Lord Byron, who was also no stranger to the workings of human nature, has described his Lara as unable to contemplate a scene of quiet moonlight loveliness :

"It was a moment only for the good :  
 So Lara deemed, nor longer there he stood,  
 But turned in silence to his castle-gate--  
 Such scene his soul no more could contemplate

• • • • •

A night like this,  
 A night of beauty mocked such breast as his."

About the time that the deepening obscurity of the atmosphere showed the sun had deserted the sky, the rain began to fall in torrents. But the storm did not deter Enoch Sedley, who for some time had seemed waiting impatiently for the shades of evening to close in, that he might go forth, and, unobserved, carry some plan into execution. His brow, as he prepared to set out, had those deep, perpendicular lines, and his mouth the firm compression, which are said to denote determination of character. Toward the block house he directed his steps. Before approaching it very closely, he made the entire circuit of the building, to be sure no listener was at hand to overhear him. Then cautiously drawing near, he called upon its inmate, in a low tone.

A long and earnest conversation ensued, in the course of which the old man made a full disclosure to Dudley of the circumstances connected with the death of Overton. Other matters were discussed between them ; but the purport of these we leave to be gleaned from the following pages of our narrative.

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The fifth day since the arrest of Dudley arrived. The eye of Lucy Dayton began to resume something of its former brilliancy, and her cheek its bloom. How far this result was to be ascribed to the natural tendency of a young and vigorous mind to throw off sorrow, and how far to the purport of several conversations she had found means to hold with Dudley, we shall not pretend to determine. Her uncle and she had, also, two or three times been closeted for a long while together, and the good old man's communications had probably not been without their effect in lessening the load on both their hearts. To one of these conferences, which occurred on the evening of the fifth day, Cato, in whose

attachment and fidelity the utmost confidence was placed, was called.

As Cato issued from the apartment in which he had been honored with a confidential communication from his master, and his much loved and honored "young missy," there was something of ludicrous importance in his air; his face wore an expression more nearly approaching to a smile than had been seen on his ebony countenance for several days. A small bundle or package, rolled carefully up, was tucked under one arm, and with the other hand closing the door softly, and opening a second as noiselessly as possible, he stepped out of the house, and glided along the little path that led toward the village, with a tread as light as if performing the juggler's trick of walking upon eggs.

"Very important bizness Cato has on hand," he remarked, with an air of great self-complacency. "Reckon they're beginnin' to 'preciate his gen'us. Can't get along in big matters without Cato's help. No, sah!"

He walked rapidly forward, continually grinning with delight, for he was indeed upon an errand which was a pleasant one.

"Lord! golly! hebbens! won't there be a time when I does it! How dey'll open dere eyes! Whoop? what's dat? Git out!"

A bat swooped down so close to his ebony visage as to make him recoil in afright, and spring suddenly from the ground.

"Golly! t'ought dere was somebody follerin' me. Wonder if dere's *ghostes* trabelin' about to-night!"

The affrighted negro walked several yards on tiptoe, glancing about him, and listening as though he expected to hear the footfall of some apparition; but, hearing none, he resumed his soliloquy:

"*Ghostes* stays at hum *sich* nights. Who's afeard, any way? Cato is a darkey dat nebber knowed de base passion ob fear. No, sah!—Lord! hebbens! I'm bit by a rattle-snake!"

The African being barefoot, was walking carefully along,

when something struck his ankle with a sharp, stinging thrust, such as is made by the fang of the rattlesnake. He was following a sort of path, where these reptiles had been seen on several occasions, and now was certain that he was doomed. Dropping his load, he caught up the foot in both hands, hopping around on the other, giving utterance all the while to the most doleful lamentations.

"I's killed! I's killed! I can nebber see Massa Dudley now! It's all up! Now I lay me down to sleep—blast dat snake! what did he bite dis niggah for?—I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die—Lord bress me! darnation—fire—cus dat snake! my delicate ankle am swelled as big as de stove-pipe now. Cuss dat reptil! What did he want to bite me for?—I pray de Lord my soul to take!"

And, dropping on the ground, he rolled over and over in his agony, muttering and groaning harder than ever.

"What did I come 'long *dis* path for? Might've knowed dar war snakes curled up waitin' for me. Blast em! Why didn't de arnery cuss rattle his tail afore he stuck his tooth into my pusson? It's all up with Cato now. Might've knowed better dan to try and sabe Massa Dudley. Blast 'im! he kin stay in de block house for all I keers. It's all up with Cato, and he might as well die fust as last."

And, rolling over on his back, he straightened out his limbs, and waited for the advent of the Dark Angel. But, somehow or other, the latter personage delayed his coming considerably. By-and-by Cato reached down to see how fast his leg was swelling.

"Lord! golly! hebbens! 'spect the cussed leg will bust them new trousers Miss Dayton made for me. Blast that reptil! Why couldn't he bit somebody else!"

Lying motionless some twenty minutes longer, he felt of the other ankle, then of both; then rose to the sitting position, rubbed them as though a sudden itching had seized them, and looked stupefied and amazed at some discovery he had made.

"Lord! golly! hebbens! Which ankle did the cuss bite? He must have bit both, or else both am swelled **amazin**."

He seemed in a quandary, unable to recollect where he had been wounded.

"It's forgotten. Qu'ar how bofe ankles swell. Maybe neither one ain't bit by the serpent!"

Overjoyed at the prospect, he minutely examined each ankle, so far as the moonlight would enable him, the result of which was that he could not divine where he had been hurt. Encouraged by this, he made search for the reptile itself, and was unable to find it. While cautiously searching, his hand encountered a brier, and the cause of his slight wound was immediately manifest.

"Yah! yah! what a fool Cato made of himself!" he laughed, as he resumed his burden and journey.

The distance to the block house was not less than two miles, but it was accomplished by the trusty and happy negro in a time that exhibited very considerable powers of pedestrianism.

On approaching the little isolated building, Cato manifested a degree of caution altogether disproportioned to the likelihood of interruption. At last, apparently satisfied that no one was near the spot, he stole to the door, produced a large key from his pocket, inserted it in the lock, and turned back the bolt with a sudden wrench. The door, owing to the sides of the building being slanting, flew open with a force which might very materially have disarranged the poor boy's ideas, had not his brains been protected by a cranium whose thickness, on this occasion at least, was not to be found fault with. Recovering from his surprise (for he was more scared than hurt), he stepped softly into the block house.

The block house had been erected at a time when two or three settlers, besides Enoch Sedley, were the only white inhabitants within many miles; in constructing it, Sedley had been the guiding spirit. In order to secure the arms and ammunition, from time to time deposited there, as any circumstance gave rise to apprehensions of the Indians, a strong lock was obtained from New Orleans. In giving the order for this, Sedley had bethought him of procuring another at the same time, with which he might fasten his own house in

case of a sudden assault of the savages. These locks, it happened, were precisely alike, so that the keys fitted both indiscriminately ; but this circumstance had entirely faded from the memory, not only of such of the settlers as might once have known it, but even of Sedley himself, until recalled to mind by his thoughts being earnestly exercised in an endeavor to form some plan of releasing the prisoner.

Whatever was the nature and object of Cato's errand to our hero, it was not dispatched without a considerable delay. He at length reissued from the block house, closed the door carefully, and turned to pursue his way home. Several times he paused, and looked at the bundle (which he still carried) with a perplexed air, as if his mind were grappling with some subject it could not altogether master. All at once, a gleam of intelligence lighted up his black features, denoting that he had hit upon a lucky thought.

"Hah ! dat's it—dat's it !" said he, speaking to himself ; "dat will be sure to trow 'em on de wrong scent. I'll de-range it all now, and dey shall see de nigger knows a t'ing or two, as well as de res' of 'em."

That night, an hour or two after Sedley and his niece had retired to rest, the door of a smaller log-cabin, which answered the purpose of a kitchen to the main structure, might have been seen to open, and honest Cato, stealing cautiously out, once more took his way toward the village. The moon was partially hid behind a cluster of clouds, now scudding back before a pleasant western breeze to the quarter whence they had lately issued. Enough light shone through the intervals, however, to have betrayed the motions of the negro, had any eye been watching him. In one hand he carried a spade, and in the other the same bundle with which he had lately returned from the block house.

The night was fast melting into morning when he came back, and he dragged his limbs after him in a way that showed his expedition had been attended with fatigue. But as he knelt down at the kitchen-hearth, and blew the smouldering embers into a flame, the red light that fell on his countenance revealed a pleased and somewhat consequential



expression, as if he had satisfactorily accomplished the object of his expedition.

Through the whole of the following day Sedley was absent from his cabin. Before he departed, he held a long conversation with Lucy, and gave a number of minute and particular orders to Cato, which, to impress them more certainly upon his memory, he repeated several times. During his absence, Lucy and the black bustled about with a degree of activity which presented quite a contrast with the usually serene manners of the one, and the somewhat grotesque motions of the other. The portraits which had graced the rude walls were taken down, the books removed from the hanging shelves, and sundry boxes and bundles scattered round the room indicated preparations for some unusual step. An old cat, which had long been the privileged tenant of the chimney-corner, moved mewing and fidgeting about, and cast uneasy looks around, as if its instinct informed it of the meaning of the bustle.

At last the arrangements were all completed, and while Cato employed himself in removing the packages to some appointed place, Lucy strolled out into her garden to pluck one more bouquet from the place she had nurtured with assiduous care—to take one more look, before the light of sunset faded wholly from the scene, of those objects which had been to her as friends since the dawn of recollection. The nimble motions of the negro had allowed her not much time for meditation. He soon returned to the cabin, and as he again issued thence, with a trunk on his shoulder, and two or three bundles in his hand, he called to inform her that he was now carrying his last load. Following the boy in silence, and casting many a lingering look behind, Lucy wound down the northern declivity of the bluff.

## CHAPTER XII.

## WAITING AND PARTING.

“ See the light pinnace  
 Draws nigh to the shore,  
 Swiftly it glides  
 At the heave of the oar.”—PERCIVAL.

“ He came not though the night grew on,  
 He came not though the winds plead ‘ come.’ ”—NORTON.

THE moon had begun to shed a feeble glimmer through the twilight air, when a small boat, propelled by two oars or paddles, glided into the shadowy gorge of a ravine, through which a little tributary of the Ohio babbled on its way to join the mightier stream. A female sat in the after-part of the boat, her person partly hid by the shed or covering which extended over nearly half its length. A black strippling, of some sixteen or seventeen, who had acted as oarsman, sprung lightly to land, and, after securing the fragile vessel to a stake, turned and proceeded quickly forward, clambering along the side of the ravine. The female eyed his progress with an appearance of intense interest, and seemed to tremble whenever a stone, loosened by his tread, rattled down into the water. A turn in the ravine soon snatched him from her sight.

The course of the deep dell or gully, at the mouth of which the boat had paused, ran near the foot of the mound on which the block house was erected, and thence proceeded westward, forming that gap between the bluffs in the background, across which it has been mentioned that a rude bridge had been thrown, at an altitude which made it a picturesque feature in the scene.

More than half an hour had not elapsed from the time the negro left the boat, when he emerged from the hollow, near the block house, and at a point where the building threw a long shadow on the ground. He had departed empty-handed, but now seemed to be bearing or dragging something which required the exertion of all his strength,

and his hard breathing could scarcely have escaped the ears of the prisoner. At length, casting his burden down in the shadow by the side of the building, he once more drew forth his key, applied it to the lock, and warned by *sore* experience (if we may be allowed so poor a pun), stood at a safe distance as the heavy door flew open.

"Ha, Massa Dudley," said the black to the figure that sprung out of the cell, "you look something like a rail Kentuck hunter now;" and the young man, as he stepped out into the moonlight, showed that he was dressed in the hunting-frock and leggings of the Western rangers.

"Hab a care, Massa Dudley, and stand out of de moonshine, or somebody mought see you," whispered the thoughtful negro.

"Come, let us hasten, then, to the boat, Cato," said Dudley. "There is no time to be lost; the jailer did not come as usual at sunset, and he may yet take it into his head to pay me a last visit."

"Las' visit—yah! yah! dat's true enough, it will be his las'," replied the black, grinning.

"Come, come, Cato, why do you stand there? Let us be gone at once!" exclaimed our hero, with something of impatience in his tone.

"Neber mind me, Massa Dudley. You go 'traight down de gulley, and dat will fetch you to de boat. I'se follow you directly."

Dudley did as desired by the negro, and, descending into the ravine, hurried forward to join his Lucy—his wife—from whom he had been so strangely separated in the very hour, almost the very minute, of their union.

The negro, left to himself, found occupation which engaged him very earnestly for a considerable time. He first repaired to the burden which he had thrown down beside the building, and dragged it with all his might and main into the block house, where he stayed several minutes. On issuing again, he seemed to have a small string, or something of the sort, in his hand, which he laid carefully along the ground toward the edge of the ravine. He then returned to the block house,

that its door cautiously, and, stooping down, appeared to be groping about for the string, when he was suddenly aroused by the blow of a heavy hand upon his back. The poor negro, frightened half to death by this startling interruption, leaped like a wounded deer straight up into the air, to a height which we will not risk our credit for veracity by stating in feet and inches. He had been so wholly absorbed in the business he was about, that he was not conscious of an approaching footstep; and as he now turned, his teeth chattering, and his eyes staring with fear, he encountered the short, thick form of the official dignitary, who, on the arrest of Dudley, had been appointed to discharge the important duties of jailer. He held a lantern in his hand, and the shifting light it threw upon his face showed he was enjoying the terror of the negro.

"Well, Mr. Blackskin, what are you sneaking round here for?" said he, in a tone more good-natured than the words.

"I—I—is only—jist come, Massa Ward—to—to—to see—Massa Dudley a little minute—dat's all," said Cato, stammering out his reply with great difficulty.

"Well, I—is—only—jist come—on the very same business—dat's all," returned the jailer, mimicking the black; and then, bursting into a hearty laugh at his own drollery, he continued, "get out of the way, snow-ball, and let me see that all is safe—dat's all."

He raised his heavy key, but, casting a hesitating glance from it to the door, which seemed to say that it was too much trouble to unlock and lock the ponderous portal when the end might be as well attained without, he turned aside, and, holding his lantern in such a way that it cast its light between the logs, put his eyes to a crevice, and looked into the building.

"Ah, all's right," said he. "What, asleep so early? well, that's the true way—it's good to take trouble easy. You might better crawl into your bed, though; but I reckon as you stuck so close to it all day, you had rather try the bare logs for a while. Well, I wish you a sound nap, anyhow;" and so saying, the man moved off, to the infinite relief of

poor Cato, who waited not long after him, but precipitately descending the mound, secreted himself in one of the recesses of the ravine.

In the mean while Dudley had gained the boat, and joined his young bride, whom he pressed in eloquent silence to his bosom. They now only waited the arrival of Enoch Sedley to set off.

“Surely it is past the hour by which he said he would be here,” whispered Lucy, whose heart fluttered wildly with many mixed emotions.

Dudley cast an impatient glance toward the moon, of whose time of rising he seemed to know enough to assent to Lucy's remark. Probably his answer would have been the same had there been neither moon nor stars, nor any other celestial time-piece to consult; for an impatient spirit is ever in advance of the hour. But, though there might not have been much ground for apprehension at first, yet, as minute after minute crept tardily away, and those minutes had grown almost into an hour, and still Sedley came not, it must be confessed there was little wonder that their hearts became greatly alarmed.

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The business which had detained Enoch Sedley all day from his home was to complete an arrangement for the sale of his farm with a person who resided several miles distant. This object was at last accomplished, though at the expense of more time than had been anticipated; and the sun was not far above the western horizon when the old man set out on his return. His road lay along the summit of the bluffs; he had proceeded at a fast gait and without interruption as far as the wild-looking bridge which spanned an abrupt gap between two of them, when, in jerking the rein of his horse, which manifested some reluctance to cross the rude structure, the bridle-bit broke. This accident rendered it necessary to dismount, and contrive some means of repairing it. While he was thus engaged, Nathan Dodge, returning from one of his peddling excursions, drove up.

"Why, what's the matter, neighbor Sedley?" asked he, stopping his horse, and getting off from the box. "I rather guess you've broke down, or something, ain't you?"

"Ah, Nathan," replied the old man, "you're just the person I should have wished for. I dare say, now, you have something about you that I can fasten this bit with, so that it will hold together till I get home."

The peddler thrust his hand into one of his pockets, and drew thence a handful of miscellaneous rubbish. Sedley selected what suited his purpose, and Dodge returned the others to his pocket. As he did so, his eyes, ever turning inquisitive glances in all directions, fell upon the stirrup-strap of Sedley's saddle. There was something in its appearance which fixed his attention for a moment, when he moved round to the other side of the horse, as if to examine the opposite stirrup-leather.

"Well, now, I vow that's strange!" ejaculated he between his teeth; and he stepped to his wagon-box, whence he directly returned with the very strap that had been fastened round the body of Overton, but holding it in such a way that the flap of his coat covered it from sight. Sedley was too busy repairing his bridle to pay heed to the motions of the peddler.

"Well, neighbor Sedley," said he, "I kind o' guess your stirrup-leathers ain't fellows. This one this side is a right nice one. I should like to know what's come of the match on it."

"I lost it in the woods a long time ago," said the old man, not pleased with the question.

"That was bad," returned the peddler, "because you don't get such straps every day in this wooden country. Whereabouts might you have lost it?"

"Oh, fifteen or twenty miles up the river, or may be more," answered the old man, a good deal embarrassed.

"This stirrup-leather is the very mate of it," said the peddler, showing the one which had been found with the body. "They are as like as two peas, and I sort o' guess they're twins." As he said this, he fixed his keen, twinkling eyes upon Sedley.

"Poh! poh! I tell you mine is lost," stammered the old man.

"And this was lost, too, but was found again, and in rather a queer place for a stirrup-leather to be lost. It was found tied to the feet of Ned Overton's body."

"Ha! let me see it!" cried the voice of a third person, who, unperceived, had joined the group.

Both turned quickly round, and saw the sinister countenance of Hugh Overton leering between their shoulders. He was just returning from a hunting excursion that had lasted two or three days, and as he glided toward the group with his stealthy Indian tread, his soft, light moccasins had given them no warning of his approach. The woodman rudely seized the stirrup-leather from the hands of the peddler, and hastily comparing it with the corresponding one attached to the saddle, turned to Sedley, and abruptly accused him of being accessory to the murder of his brother. As he uttered this charge in a boisterous voice, he grasped the old man by the collar, and called upon the peddler for assistance.

"Hold off your hand!" cried Sedley, his face first flushing with crimson, and then fading to a pallid hue.

"Ay, ay, hands off," repeated the peddler, "and let's inquire a little further into this business."

But Hugh Overton—who was probably the originator of the now common Kentucky boast that he could "lick his weight in wild-cats," and who really had pretensions in the way of personal strength and daring that went further than mere respect for his character in producing the cool civility with which he was generally treated—Hugh Overton showed no disposition to obey the command of either the old man or the peddler. Sedley, fatigued, exhausted, conscience-stricken, made but feeble efforts at resistance. Yet still he did resist, and in the struggle was backed up against one of the rails that protected the sides of the bridge. These were nothing more than long, slender saplings, supported at either end by forked posts, to which they were fastened by withes stripped from their own bark. Overton, in his blind fury, pushed the old man with such violence against this frail barrier that

the elastic pole sprung out to some distance beyond the edge of the bridge. The peddler saw the imminent danger in which they were placed, and shouted aloud to them, but not soon enough to prevent the catastrophe. In a frenzied struggle to release himself from his perilous situation, Sedley had unwittingly increased the momentum given to his body—the pole bent and snapped—the brittle ligaments which bound the ends gave way—and the old man, in an aimless effort to save himself, grappling the ruffian convulsively by the neck, both together fell crackling and crashing among the bushes which grew from the sides of the deep abyss. One wild, shrill scream of mortal terror burst from their lips as they descended—and then all was still! And the peddler, who ran instantly to the spot, received no reply to the loud call which he shouted down the glen, nor could he hear any sound as he bent his ear over the edge of the bridge, save the faint murmur of the little stream that rippled on its course nearly a hundred feet below. The bushes which here and there projected from the steep banks of the cleft would have prevented him from seeing to the bottom, had it been noon-day; and now, in the gathering twilight, they gave an obscurity to the air in the narrow and dismal-looking valley that added to the feelings of awe created by the tragical event. Two or three times he repeated his call; and as his voice died away, the deep silence that each time succeeded produced in the bosom of the sturdy peddler a sensation not unlike the creeping of fear. To descend into the hollow by the craggy and almost precipitous banks was not to be undertaken; and there was no speedier way of affording succor to those who had fallen (if they yet lived) than by pursuing the road to Adrianopolis. Never before did Nathan Dodge drive with such fury down the spur of the bluff as on this occasion. But he was doomed to experience, before he reached the bottom, the truth of the saying, “the more haste, the less speed.” His wagon, unused to being jolted at so rough a rate over the stony and uneven road, broke down. This accident, however, did not much delay his progress, as he barely paused to strip the harness from his horse, when, throwing



himself upon its back, he galloped on toward the village. On reaching Adrianopolis, the alarm was soon spread, and in a few minutes a party of more than twenty villagers were on their way to the ravine into which Sedley and Overton had been precipitated. The peddler returned but brief answers to the questions asked of him in relation to the affray which had been so fearfully terminated ; for he had not forgotten the consequences that had recently resulted from his over-readiness to tattle, and besides, had his own reasons for saying little about the strap. The party, in the mean while, moved as quickly up the hollow way as the nature of the ground would permit, and in something less than three hours after the accident occurred, reached that part of the ravine which, far above, was spanned by the bridge whence Sedley and Overton had fallen.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### LIFE'S CLOSING SCENE.

*"After life's fitful fever he sleeps well."—BYRON.*

THE bodies were found but a few feet from each other, cruelly bruised and torn. Their embrace had been sundered in the descent, but fragments of the hunter's garments, still held in the clenched fingers of Sedley, attested the convulsive tenacity of his gripe. From Overton's body all appearance of life had departed. The old man was also insensible, but showed some signs of life, and after a little time opened his eyes and appeared to have some vague glimmerings of consciousness. His mind seemed to be running on his niece, whose name he mumbled faintly, and it was thought from the tenor of some incoherent phrases that fell from his lips, that he fancied himself descending the river with her in a boat.

The inhabitants of Adrianopolis generally entertained a

great respect for Enoch Sedley, and this was partly shown in the sympathy they expressed for his present fate, and the readiness and gentleness with which they raised his lacerated body from the earth, and bore it toward the town. They were yet on their way, and had reached within a quarter of a mile of the block house, when a near and loud explosion—so loud that it was heard for fifty miles down the Ohio—burst upon their ears; the ground rocked beneath their feet as if heaved by an earthquake. Some of the group were thrown to the earth—others fell down in terror—and all turned their eyes in amazement to the block house, whence the deafening shock proceeded. A vivid gush of fire ascended from it in a huge inverted cone to the clouds, and massy fragments of the building—logs, rafters, stones—were performing high curves through air, which was reddened for miles around by the intense and sulphurous blaze. While the terrified spectators were still looking in blank amazement upon the scene an enormous shaft of timber, scorched and blackened by the flames, fell endwise to the earth but a few feet before them, and with such force that it was driven nearly half its length into the soil. Fragments of the ruin were scattered far and wide, and the two who were waiting in the boat turned pale as they looked into each other's faces by the lurid glare, and heard the cinders, stones and sand sprinkling into the water round them. When the sudden brightness of the explosion passed away, the earth for some minutes seemed wrapped in profound darkness, so feeble and sickly was the light of the moon in contrast with the intense gush of flame, which had shed its lurid glow over a wide circle, startling the birds far away in the forest, and causing them to rise fluttering in the air, as if the day had suddenly dawned.

A considerable time elapsed before those who were bearing Sedley dared to move, so long did portions of the wreck continue to fall from the immense height to which they had been ejected. The tremendous shock seemed to have aroused the senses of the poor old man, who faintly opened his eyes and looked about, as if to ascertain the cause of the dreadful explosion. The ruins of the block house were still blazing, and

shed a flickering light over the immediate scene of the accident, and as he feebly turned his face in that direction, something like intelligence seemed struggling to his eye. A cry of horror now burst from a group clustered round some object which had just fallen a little in advance of the party who were carrying Sedley.

"It is the body of Dudley!" shouted two or three voices: and attracted by the exclamation, all crowded to the spot. A blackened and mutilated trunk, from which the head and one of the legs had been separated by the concussion, was lying on the grass; and the tattered and scorched garments in which it was wrapped, though much defaced, were easily recognized as those which had been worn by the prisoner.

This information, communicated to Sedley, seemed to have an electric effect in rekindling for a moment the nearly extinguished spark of life. His eye lighted up, and his face worked with an emotion unlike that of bodily pain. He desired to be set down, and begged those who were standing near him to hear and mark his words. He then proceeded, in a voice low and broken by the difficulty of respiration, to confess that it was he, not Dudley, who had slain Overton. The bystanders at first cast covert and incredulous glances at each other, as if they attributed the old man's speech to the wanderings of his mind. But he related, though in words so choked and interrupted as to be scarcely articulate, yet otherwise in so connected and clear a manner, the circumstances of that fatal affray, that the villagers were forced to believe.

"But the horse-shoe, and the hoof-prints," said one in whose mind doubt was still struggling.

"My horse had been lamed and tired down in the first chase," feebly responded the old man, with a painful effort—"I took his—little thinking it would be the means of leading him to this untimely death."

The light shed from the ruined block house shone on the old man as he made these revelations, giving a ghastly effect to the workings of his pallid features. He sunk back exhausted in uttering the last explanation, and for some moments remained in a state of insensibility. The bystanders (their

number now increased by accessions from the village, the inhabitants of which were hurrying toward the scene of the explosion) began to think that life had utterly departed, when he again opened his eyes. But the light of intelligence was now gone from them—they were glassy and rayless ; and his low, incoherent murmurings too plainly told that reason had fled.

“Self-defence, Lucy—kiss me, child, and dry your tears ! Who calls me murderer?—shove off, Cato, and pull away stoutly—there, they’ll never overtake us now—your name can’t suffer, Charles, for they don’t know it—ha ! the water’s thick with blood, and see, see ! Overton’s black face is grinning in the midst of it !”

Such were some of the disjointed phrases which fell at intervals from his working lips. The allusion to Overton was the last word he uttered, and as they were spoken, the vividness with which the image of the floating body was presented to his disordered imagination might have been partly inferred from the strong convulsive movement it occasioned.

“Stand back ! stand back, and give him air !” cried several voices, as the old man with a gasping effort half raised himself from the grass. Sedley rolled his rayless eyes round the receding circle, the muscles of his frame relaxed, he tumbled heavily and prone upon the ground, and the light let in by the opening of the crowd fell on the stiffened features of a corpse.

A black boy who had that moment joined the group now broke through the ring, and falling on his knees beside the body, took its cold hand in his own, and wept aloud. There was something touching in the faithful negro’s grief, and the crowd for some moments did not interrupt the simple but heart-warm expressions in which he gave utterance to it. At length a murmur ran from one to another, and the necessity of removing the body began to be spoken of. This conversation seemed to recall the negro’s mind from the depths of affliction to the consideration of other circumstances. Several persons, each emulous to show himself more active than the rest, had left the group with the purpose of procuring rails or

some other materials for constructing a temporary bier. The black also rose to his feet, and casting one long and earnest look upon the body, turned and glided from the crowd.

We left Lucy and Dudley at the moment when their ears were stunned by the loud and near sound of the explosion. The cause of the occurrence had been soon explained to them by Cato, who, soon after the shock, came rattling along the bank of the ravine to join them. The plan of blowing up the block house had been devised by him with the purpose of concealing the flight of Dudley. He was aware, it seems, that a quantity of powder, deposited in the vault of that building at a time when an irruption of the Indians was apprehended, had never been removed. The idea struck him that if he could possess himself of the body of Overton, dress it in the clothes of our hero, and deposit it in the block house, fragments of it would probably be found after the explosion, and lead to a belief that Dudley had perished—perhaps in an attempt to escape by setting fire to the building—and that thus all danger of pursuit would be avoided. The plan was not without ingenuity, nor was it altogether unsuccessful; though in several respects poor Cato had been sadly disappointed. The loudness of the detonation had terrified him exceedingly; and when, scared as much as those who without knowing any thing of his plans had been meant to be principally benefited by them, he scampered down to the boat, it was in the full confidence that he should meet his master there, as well as the other fugitives, and find them ready to set off instantly upon their voyage.

Enoch Sedley, however, had not yet reached the place of embarkation, and, as the reader knows, was destined never to reach it. After waiting several minutes longer in a state of the most excruciating suspense, Cato was again dispatched to ascertain, if he could, the cause of the delay. During his absence, the roar of the distant flames, the murmurs of the crowd, and every sound that reached the ears of Dudley and Lucy, gave additional poignancy to the nervous anxiety they felt. At last Cato, pale, sobbing, and half-breathless, returned to the boat, and as he sprang aboard, exclaimed in a voice

almost choked by the combined effects of grief and haste, that his master was dead.

"Dead!" screamed Lucy, starting to her feet

"Dead!" ejaculated Charles.

Cato entered into a broken explanation, which was not so indistinct but that they gathered something of the manner in which Sedley had come to his end.

"I must go," said Lucy, rising and preparing to leave the boat.

"And leave me, Lucy?" said Dudley.

"He is my uncle—my more than father," replied Lucy, hesitating.

"And I your husband."

"His dead body may be exposed to insult if I do not go."

"And my living body will be dragged to a shameful death if you do. He—the sole witness of my innocence, for whose sake and yours, dear Lucy, my life now stands in peril—is gone for ever. If I am seized now, my fate is certain."

Lucy sunk back on the seat, and Charles, folding her to his bosom, directed Cato to shove off. The boat glided along like a spirit in the broad line of shadow cast upon the water by the high bank and the forest that nodded on its brink, and was presently lost to sight as it disappeared in one of the indentures of the winding shore.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### CONCLUSION.

"Few words of mine remain to close the tale."—BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

A PERIOD of several years now elapsed before those incidents occurred which conclude this narrative. If the reader knows anything of the rapid growth of towns in the West, he will have little difficulty in imagining the change which

seven years wrought in Adrianopolis. The pompous plans of its projector had indeed been realized to an extent which few could have predicted. Its population had increased a hundred-fold. Its avenues, squares, and public buildings were no longer "airy nothings," but had now an existence as well as a name. Ample warehouses and neat dwellings lined the streets; a busy multitude thronged them; and the little straggling frontier village was fast rising to the dignity of a populous city. The suburbs reached nearly to the mound which has been the scene of a chief part of the action of this story. The mound itself now was a cultivated field; and the only vestige to remind one of the incidents related, were a heap of blackened logs and stones just visible above the corn-blades which rustled around them.

This object seemed to have attracted the attention of two travellers who chanced to pass that way on their road to Adrianopolis one fine summer afternoon, seven years after the explosion had converted the block house into a heap of ruins. One of them, a slender, delicate young man, was mounted on a fine horse. The other traveller was a tall, uncouthly shaped person, whose pale and sober countenance was marked with lines that showed his age could not have been much short of forty. He bestrode a small ambling horse; and his awkward figure was set off to peculiar disadvantage by the shortness of his stirrups, which seemed drawn up to the last hole to keep the rider's feet from dragging on the ground.

"And here, then," said the younger person, pausing at the foot of the mound, "is the place where the unfortunate Dudley met his end."

"It was so thought at first," returned the other; "but a different opinion soon came to be entertained. The body, which was supposed to be Dudley's, and which was certainly habited in his garments, was so dreadfully mutilated that it was difficult to recognize it; but there were circumstances which caused many who saw it by daylight to declare that it was not the body of Dudley, but of Ned Overton, the hunter. This opinion was afterward confirmed by an examination of

the hunter's grave, which was found to have been rifled of its tenant."

"Then Dudley may perhaps have escaped," said the younger man.

"I fear not. The inquiries immediately set on foot furnished reason to believe that, with Sedley's niece and slave, he had attempted to descend the river; and a party set out to overtake him, and inform him that the confession of the old man had exonerated him from all suspicion of the murder. They had not proceeded far, however, when they were encountered, and obliged to desist from their purpose, by one of those hurricanes which sometimes cover the Ohio with wrecks. From intelligence that afterward reached Adrianopolis, it is too probable that Dudley and all with him perished in the storm."

"And has nothing ever since been heard to change that opinion?"

"Nothing. There was at one time, a year or two after the escape, a sort of rumor in the town that Dudley was still living; but this, on being traced, was not found to have any better foundation than certain obscure hints thrown out by the former postmaster of Adrianopolis, whose curiosity, it was suspected, sometimes led him to pry rather too closely into the contents of the letters which passed through his hands. It was said that a package from Dudley himself had been received by Nathan Dodge; and this story gained additional currency from the fact that, shortly after, carpenters were seen busy in constructing a neat pale round the spot where Sedley's remains were buried. But Dodge, who had just become permanently settled in the village, denied that he had received any such letter; and, indeed, a sufficient reason for his inclosing the old man's grave might be found in the fact that he himself had been the unwitting means of bringing him to his tragical end. But see," resumed the speaker, after a moment's pause, "yonder comes a steamboat round the point; let us jog along, and we shall be in time to see her come to at the landing."

**The two riders turned their horses' heads toward the town,**



and trotted forward at a gait too rapid to allow of much further conversation.

A large crowd of persons was assembled on the principal quay to witness the arrival of the steamboat. At the time of our story, this wonderful invention, which has since exerted so vast an influence in the valley of the Mississippi, was of very recent date ; and but a short period had elapsed since the thunders of the first steamboat awakened the echoes of the Western forests. The arrival of a boat was, therefore, still a matter of sufficient interest to draw a large portion of the inhabitants to the water's edge ; and in the present instance, the graceful movement of the vessel, as she dashed by the town, and, rounding to with an ample sweep, glided up to the wharf against the current, fully repaid them for the trouble they had taken.

Among the passengers who stepped ashore, one group attracted particular attention. This consisted of a lady and gentleman, accompanied by two little boys, and followed by a tidy black servant bearing their baggage. The lady, though the two living miniatures of herself who walked hand in hand before her showed her to be a matron, was yet in the first bloom of womanhood ; her small and well-turned figure could have lost but little of its roundness, and her step not much of its elasticity. Her eye wandered from the group about her to the distant hills, and certain changes flitted over her countenance which one accustomed to peruse that index of the mind would have ascribed to a deeper cause than mere sensibility to the beauties of external nature. Her husband, of a manly figure, with an open and highly intellectual countenance, walked at her side ; and though probably more skilled than his beautiful partner in suppressing outward signs of what was passing within, on this occasion showed, not less than herself, that he was much moved by the recollections associated with surrounding objects.

"Who is he?" "Where is he from?" were questions whispered from one to another as the group passed on toward the principal hotel of Adrianopolis. And as the negro trudged along at some distance behind, more than one curious

glance was directed to the plate upon the trunks to ascertain the owner's name.

“Why bless us, ‘C. D. Elton!’ it is Elton, the great Eastern lawyer!” exclaimed half a dozen voices; and a crowd gathered round those who had made this discovery, to discuss the merits of the jurist, the fame of whose talents and eloquence had reached even to the remote town of Adrianopolis.

The two mounted travellers had by this time ridden into the town, and as they passed the group of passengers, the eye of the elder rested on the countenance of the stranger. He drew up his horse with an involuntary motion of surprise, and remained gazing after him until he disappeared within the door of the hotel.

“It is he!” muttered the horseman; “if the waters can give up their prey, it is he himself!” and so saying, he turned and rode at a round trot toward the tavern.

A tall, lounging, and somewhat tawdrily-dressed figure stood in the door of a shop near at hand, the shelves of which presented a large variety of tin-ware, arranged in glistening rows. His attention seemed to have been drawn toward the negro, who was walking leisurely up the street with his burden, and casting curious glances upon every object round him, while a broad grin upon his ebony face betrayed that he was pleased with all he saw. As he came opposite the shopkeeper, the latter cried out:

“Well, now, I vow, that's strange! Why, Cato, it ain't you, is it?”

“Ah, ha! Massa Dodge; how you do, Massa Dodge? I is berry glad to see you,” responded the black; and, putting the trunks upon the ground, he exchanged with our honest friend, Nathan, a cordial embrace. The peddler stepped back to the shop, turned the key in the door, and, joining the black, walked forward with him at a quick pace toward the hotel.

“Charles Dudley, I declare!” exclaimed the former peddler, but now prosperous dealer in tin-ware, as he approached the stranger.

"Charles Dudley *Elton*, my old friend," exclaimed the newly-arrived gentleman, as he clasped the hand of Nathan. "And this," he added, turning to the lady at his side, "is my wife, Lucy Dayton Elton; and these are my boys, Enoch and Sedley," he added, in his hurried introduction.

The astonished Nathan could only say, "Waal, I declare!" as he clasped the hands of all in his own.

The crowd soon caught the news, and ere long it became known that the man tried and condemned for the murder of Ned Overton, was again in their midst. As Elton, the lawyer, his renown had penetrated to the vigorous young city which had been the scene of so much sorrow and joy to Charles Dudley, and the notabilities of Adrianopolis hastened to pay their respects to him. Members of the bar, judges, civilians came, but poor Scroggs was "hurriedly called away," as Nathan answered, when Mr. Elton asked for the wonderful little prosecutor, whose eloquence had consigned the poor Dudley to the block house.

In the crowd who flocked to the hotel came the shoemaker and the tailor. Nathan was not slow to request them, in a significant way, to "retire to the shades of their dirty shops," at the same time pointing significantly to his own ponderous boot, which moved menacingly on the floor, as if anxious for a little exercise at *lifting*. The shoemaker and the tailor disappeared as suddenly as shadows, sadder, if not wiser men. Nathan had never ceased to be their evil genius; from the day when their gossiping tongues had libeled Dudley, the honest Yankee had covered them with the tribulation of his anger and contempt.

The story of Dudley's escape he soon had occasion to narrate. He had not gone down the river on the night of the catastrophe of the block house, but *up*-stream, for his residence was in Pittsburg, where his family name and fame already were linked with that city's prosperity and renown. Crossing to the Kentucky shore, his small craft was exchanged for a four-oared barge, which had been provided by Sedley, to whom many of the river-men were strongly attached. Four strong and brave fellows were easily secured to bear the fugi-

tives from the scene of their trouble. Alas! they bore away all but the person of the respected old man, whose dead body was honored by the villagers with a heartfelt burial. The story of Sedley's confession soon came to Dudley—now Elton—but he cared not to offer the gossiping public of Adrianopolis any further food for comment, by explaining to them his real relations, and his purposes in so quietly submitting to the uneven course of the severe "justice" which condemned him to the gallows.

The purpose of the present visit to Adrianopolis was the removal of the remains of Enoch Sedley to Pittsburg, where they now repose beneath a shaft of pure marble, on which is inscribed the simple inscription :

ENOCH SEDLEY,

AGED 65.

BELoved IN LIFE—TREASURED IN DEATH.





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THE BACKWOODS' BRIDE.  
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KING BARNABY.  
THE FOREST SPY  
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THE HUNTER'S CABIN.  
THE BLOCK HOUSE; OR, THE WRONG MAN  
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